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VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT

Traditional Worship in Baptist Churches in Belarus:

Formation, Features, and Internal Conflicts

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad Doctor aan
de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,
op gezag van de rector magnificus
prof.dr. V. Subramaniam,
in het openbaar te verdedigen
ten overstaan van de promotiecommissie
van de Faculteit Religie en Theologie
op vrijdag 22 januari 2021 om 13.45 uur
in de aula van de universiteit,
De Boelelaan 1105

door

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geboren te Lipniki (Brest), Belarus

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This dissertation research was completed in co-operation with the International Baptist Theological Study Centre Amsterdam, a collaborative partner of the Faculty of Religion and Theology of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is traditional worship in Baptist churches in Belarus, which in its typical form is composed of a combination of preaching, singing, prayer, and a number of other components in different forms, quantities, proportions and order. The focus of the thesis is to explore internal conflicts in worship which result from the process of shaping and adjusting historical contexts of worship to the local and current context.

The first part, where primary sources, documents and texts concerning worship are explored, covers the issues of the origin and development of the evangelical movement in Belarus. It analyses a variety of influences and connections, and reveals a conflict between local, or Russian-speaking, and foreign traditions arising within the process of adapting some western forms for the eastern situation. It also contains the analysis of the theological, religious, and political contexts that have influenced worship formation and content.

The second part covers the current shape of traditional Belarusian Baptist worship, its structure, content, duration, space of worship, and some of its theological emphases such as simplicity, centrality of the Bible, the principle of 'edification,' and evangelistic zeal. Participant observation, historical and contemporary documents, as well as questionnaires and structured interviews play an important role at this stage of research.

Some inner contradictions between the declared character and the practice of worship are identified, raising the question of the nature of the changes that would be contextually appropriate for this particular expression of Baptist identity. The third part engages in the critique of internal conflicts between freedom and forms, individual and corporate aspects, and the sacral and secular character of worship. Reflections on seemingly conflicting features open the door for possible avenues for holding them in creative tension and enriching the current practice. At the same time this study demonstrates that tensions are an integral part of worship and they are in some way inherent in the nature of worship itself.

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It is better to take fellow companions with you on the road to knowledge, especially if you “have not passed this way before” (Joshua 3:4). I thank everybody who shared with me the challenges of my journey and who have been with me while “by day the heat consumed me and the frost by night” (Gen. 31:40). First of all, they are my promoters - Marcel Barnard, Lina Toth (Andronoviene), and Parush Parushev. They had more faith in successful completion of my work than I did and have encouraged me along the way. Their sensitivity, patience, and scholarly expertise are wonderful example for those who seek wisdom. I also appreciate Jim Heizer, who invested so much of his time into compensating for my language imperfection and showing what true academic writing means.

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I thank the staff of Minsk Theological Seminary who did my work during many of my trips. I thank so much the librarian and translator of the Seminary, Valeria Naumenko, for helping to find my way in the midst of so many books and finding “delightful words” (Eccl. 12:10) in translation from the Slavic languages into English.

I thank the Lord for my family who have shared the burden of my journey. My mother Nadezhda have prayed for me, my daughters Natalia and Lilia, as well my son Timothy, who was born during the journey, have suffered my absence and my studies at home, and my wonderful wife Tatiana has been a faithful companion (1 Cor. 9:5), grieving over my failures and rejoicing in my success. She has inspired and encouraged me. I would not be able to get to the very end of this road if it were not for her help.

Many other people, whose names will be kept in my memory, have left their good marks on the way to knowledge and I trust that they are going to collect good fruit if they do not grow

weary (Gal. 6:9), and “good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, will be put” into their lap (Luke 6:38).

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ABBREVIATIONS

AUCECB	All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists
BSSR	Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
CCECB	Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists
CIS	The Commonwealth of Independent States
CSHA	Central State Historical Archive
EAAA	Euro-Asian Accrediting Association
EAF	Euro-Asian Federation (of Evangelical Christians-Baptists)
ECB	Evangelical Christians-Baptists
EKhB	Evangel'skie khristiane-baptisty (Evangelical Christians-Baptists)
ICCECB	International Council of Churches of Evangelical Baptist Christians
NARB	National Archive of the Republic of Belarus
NHAB	National Historical Archive of Belarus
Q, 2008	Questionnaire of church ministers (January, 2008)
QM, 2008	Questionnaire of church members (January, 2008)
QM, 2012	Questionnaire of church members (October, 2012)
Q, 2013	Questionnaire of Seminary's students (November, 2013)
RSB	Russian Synodal Bible
RSA	Russian State Historical Archive
SABR	State Archive of Brest Region
SARF	State Archive of the Russian Federation
SI, 2008	Structured interview of church pastors. Theological Assessment (October, 2008)
SI, 2012	Structured interview of church ministers and members (September, 2012)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VSEKhB	Vsesoyuznyy sovet evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov (All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists)
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
SSRB	Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus
UECBB	Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Belarus

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TRANSLITERATION

In this thesis I am using the established English spellings of common Russian names and terms, as found in common dictionaries. Other Cyrillic words are transliterated by the following system:

А – A;

Б – B;

В – V;

Г – G;

Д – D;

Е – E;

Ж – ZH;

З – Z;

И – I;

Й – I;

К – K;

Л – L;

М – M;

Н – N;

О – O;

П – P;

Р – R;

С – S;

Т – T;

У – U;

Ф – F;

Х – KH;

Ц – TS;

Ч – CH;

Ш – SH;

Щ – SHCH;

Ъ – ”;

Ы – Y;

Ь – ’;

Э – Е;

Ю – IY;

Я – YA.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Subject of the study

James McClendon states: “The baptists in all their variety and disunity *failed to see in their own heritage, their own way of using Scripture, their own communal practices, their own guiding vision*, a resource for theology unlike the prevailing tendencies round about them.”¹ This would be also true with respect to traditional worship service in Russian-speaking Baptist churches, including Belarus, which is the subject of this study. Traditional worship in this case refers to an average two-hour sermon- and hymn-based worship which has dominated in Belarusian Baptist churches for the last one hundred years or so. One of its prominent characteristics is two to four sermons, three or four congregational songs using *Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya* hymnal,² the use of the piano and choir, and communal prayer open to all church members. It is easier to describe such worship in contrast to contemporary worship, especially if the latter has a praise band accompanied by electronic instruments leading the praise and worship section. Belarusian Baptists do not use the definition “traditional” themselves, and such a traditional form does not have the status of the mandatory law for churches. For that reason, the presence, number and sequence of certain components, may somewhat vary in different churches at different times. However, they are united by similar “deep structures” of worship³ and a stable set of values and characteristics which are the subject of analysis in this thesis.

In terms of this study, it is necessary to also note the contextual nature of terminology. In most churches, especially those with a well-established form of gathering, getting together is

¹ James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics, Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 26. Italics authors. “McClendon identified himself as a “small-*b* Baptist” that includes the radical reformation traditions of the Mennonites, Amish, Brethren and others” (Larry L. McSwain, ed., Wm. Loyd Allen, Historical Consultant, *Twentieth-Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics* [Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008], p. 106).

² *Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya. Sbornik dukhovnykh gimnov i pesen evangel’skikh tserkvey* [Song of Revival], Collection of hymns and songs of evangelical churches (Minsk: Church of Christian of Evangelical Faith, 1996). *Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya* is the most widely used songbook in all churches that follow a traditional style of worship. It has had several editions: the first (underground) 1978 edition by the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (CCECB) contained 830 hymns, and the latest three editions include 2500, 2800 and 5000 songs respectively. From 2000 to 2012, churches have been mainly using the 1995 edition cited above containing 1316 songs. The authors of the hymns in *Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya* are not mentioned in its most popular versions.

In the main collection of hymns used in a traditional worship service there are thirty parts, two of which relate to various parts of the worship service (*Before the Beginning of Worship* — 20 hymns; *For the Conclusion* — 25) and some of them relate to various occasions in Church life and Christian Holidays: *Baptism* — 8; *Lord’s Supper* — 10 (to this category *Christ’s suffering and death* could be added, with 24 hymns); *Ordination* — 4; *Wedding ceremony* — 10; *Funeral* — 17, etc. Other parts are related to various topics in worship and Christian life. They include the following: *Prayer Anthems* — 70 hymns; *God’s Love and Greatness* — 35; *Praise and Thanksgiving* — 28; *Christian Joy* — 25; *The Way of Faith* — 64; *About the Church* — 11; *The Call to Work* — 32; *The Call to Repentance* — 90; *For New Believers* — 24; *For Children and Family* — 26; *Second Coming* — 8; *For Youth* — 114, and a number of others.

³ Christopher J. Ellis, *Gathering. A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), p. 68.

called a *bogosluženie* (“divine service”), which is analogous to the German word *Gottesdienst*. This term is typically used on the church notice board. This reflects the Russian Synodal translation of the Bible, where the term *divine service* is used four times—Jer. 52:18; Rom. 9:4; Heb. 9:1 and Heb. 9:6.⁴ The term *sobranie* (“meeting” or “gathering”) prevails in the everyday communication of church members and in worship. *Molitvennoe sobranie* (“prayer meeting”) is typically used to denote meetings outside of Sunday. The word *poklonenie* (which would be the dynamic equivalent translation of the English word “worship”) is rarely used in the Belarusian Baptist Union churches that practice traditional worship. It is a common term in new churches and can refer not only to the whole service, but also particularly to its first part that predominantly includes singing. The literal meaning of the Russian word *poklonenie* refers mostly to the position of the body while standing before the Lord and basically means “bowing low.” In its broader meaning, this word describes the awe and reverence of God. This dissertation will employ the single term “worship,” since it reflects the equivalent of the phenomenon under description in the English-speaking world, but these other terms described above must also be kept in mind.

I explore “Baptist” worship, but the terms “evangelical Christians,” “evangelical believers’,” and “Evangelicals” are also used and they refer not only to Baptists but to the various evangelical groups which existed in the Russian Empire and later in the Soviet Union territory until October 1944, when the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) was established.⁵ Thus after the Second World War, the term “Evangelicals” generally came to mean Baptists, or Baptists and Pentecostals. The latter were forced to join AUCECB in August 1945 on condition of the abandonment of speaking in tongues and foot washing in worship, and they left it once they were able to form their own Union again in 1989.

⁴ The Russian Synodal translation of the New Testament was prepared in 1820 and printed in 1825, but the publication was not released due to the changes in the political situation in Russia. The four Gospels were later printed in 1860 and the complete edition of the New Testament in 1862. The publication of the Old Testament was completed in 1876. On the history of Synodal translation, see I.A. Chistovich, *Istoriya perevoda Biblii na russkiy yazyk* [History of Translating the Bible into the Russian Language] (Moskva: Rossiiskoye bibleyskoye obshchestvo, 1997); M.I. Rizhskiy, *Istoriya perevodov Biblii v Rossii* [History of Bible translations in Russia] (Novosibirsk: “Nauka,” 1978), pp. 30-170. Very useful and detailed information can also be found on the official website of the Russian Bible Society, http://www.biblia.ru/reading/new_translations/sinodal.htm, last accessed 12 May 2019.

⁵ AUCECB, in Russian VSEKhB (Vsesoyuznyy sovet evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov), was the religious organization of evangelical Christians-Baptists in the territory of the Soviet Union. AUCECB was founded in 1944 in place of the unions of Evangelical Christians (Prokhanovtsy) and Baptists. In the early 1990s, after the breakup of the Soviet Union into a number of independent states, AUCECB was reorganized into national church unions of Evangelical Christian-Baptist churches in these states.

In Belarus, Churches of Christ, which were active in the western part of the country, merged with the Baptist Union after the Second World War and became part of AUCECB too. The movement Churches of Christ is rooted in the American Restoration Movement. The first church was founded in Pennsylvania in 1813. During their development they used such names as “Church of Christ,” “Christian Church,” and “Disciples of Christ.” Some of the churches rejected musical instruments in worship and it became their prominent characteristic. See N. Hury, *Kościół Chrystusowy w RP. 90 lat w skrócie* [Church of Christ in RP. 90 years in short] (Warszawa: Chrześcijański Instytut Biblijny, 2012), pp. 11-16. There were two Churches of Christ in Minsk and one group in Grodno in 2016, with approximately 50 members in total.

Meanwhile the term “Evangelical Christians” (with emphasis on the capital “E”) can refer to a specific group of churches in Russia and the USSR which established their own “All-Russian Union of Evangelical Christians” in 1909 in St. Petersburg, and in 1944 merged with the Baptists.⁶ However in Belarus “evangelical Christians” or “evangelical believers” and “Baptists” are often used interchangeably, and “Evangelical Christians-Baptists” (ECB) and “Baptists” are used as synonyms.⁷

1.2. Research rationale

Traditional worship in Russian-speaking Baptist churches has not so far been analyzed from historical and theological perspectives. In fact, up to this point there have been no significant studies in the theology and practice of worship in Baptist churches produced in Russian-speaking countries. Indeed, this may not be unique to the post-Soviet Baptists. Christopher Ellis, a British Baptist theologian, highlights the fact that in the free church tradition, in contrast to the “liturgical” tradition, worship analysis in general has not been paid much attention.⁸ However, in the Russian-speaking context the lack of a theology of worship is perhaps even more acute, since under the Tzarist and later Soviet persecution the Baptists had limited opportunities to develop their theological education and theology as a whole. The mere opportunity to be engaged in worship had been the primary concern, rather than its analysis.

At the present time, while there is an opportunity to compare various traditions and make use of theological literature available in other languages, attention should be paid to developing theology of worship in the local context and filling a gap in this area of theological knowledge. This is especially important in the light of the increasing relevance of the issue: at the beginning

⁶ On Evangelical Christians see Andrei Puzynin, *Tradiciya evangel'skikh khristian. Izucheniye samoidentifikatsii i bogosloviya ot momenta ee zarozhdeniya do nashih dnei* [The tradition of Evangelical Christians. The study of identity and theology from its inception to the present day] (Moskva: Bibleisko-bogoslovskiy institut sv. Apostola Andrey, 2010); I.S. Prokhanov, *V kotle Rossii* [In the Cauldron of Russia] (Chicago: World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians, 1992).

⁷ Some authors use the term Protestantism in relation to Baptists and similar groups. In this manner Cherenkov speaks about “Russian Protestantism” in Mikhail Cherenkov, *Litsom k litsu. Evangel'skaya vera v sovremennoi kul'ture* [Face to Face. Evangelical Faith in Modern Culture] (Odessa: “Khristianskoe prosveshchenie,” 2008), pp. 66-67. Kahle also uses this term along with “Eastern-Slavic Protestantism,” in which he includes the Molokans, Mennonites, Shtundists, Evangelical Christians and Baptists. See Wilhelm Kahle, *Evangel'skie khristiane v Rossii i Sovetskom Soyuze* [Evangelical Christians in Russia and the Soviet Union] (Wuppertal: Oncken-Verlag, 1978), pp. 40, 29. This work was originally published as *Evangelische Christen in Russland und der Sowjetunion*. Lisovskaya uses the term *neoprotetantizm* in order to denote Churches of Christ and Baptists (T.V. Lisovskaya, “Neoprotetantizm v Zapadnoi Belarusi v 1921-1939 gg.” Dissertatsiya na soiskaniye uchenoy stepeni kandidata istoricheskikh nauk [Neoprotetantism in Western Belarus in 1921-1939. A Thesis for the Degree of Candidate of Historical Sciences] (Minsk: Belorusskiy gosudarstvennyy universitet, 2008)). It is interesting that Baptists and Pentecostals are often called “believers,” as a way of distinguishing them from Orthodox and Catholics. Further for the term in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern European context, see Parush R. Parushev and Toivo Pilli, “Protestantism in Eastern Europe to the Present Day,” in *The Blackwell's Companion to Protestantism*, ed. Alister E. McGrath and Darren C. Marks (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004): 155-160.

⁸ Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 8.

of the twenty-first century, in the pursuit of new forms and under the influence of Western churches, some churches are giving up on various components of worship or are introducing new forms of worship without much theological reflection. A process of analyzing worship from historical, theological, and cultural perspectives is needed in order to help ministers and churches trace the development of this particular practice and map possible directions for the future. This thesis also seeks to demonstrate that it is possible to borrow tools from other traditions to evaluate and analyze local traditional worship. Conversely, this study of worship may hold value for other traditions and researchers who can use its results to enrich their tradition or to compare different types of worship.

My interest in the topic and my own position as a researcher also needs to be clarified here, as my upbringing, age, education, and ministry will affect my view.⁹ I grew up in a Baptist home and I have been visiting Baptist churches since my childhood. The first family trips were aimed at attending worship services in remote villages. There, as children and teenagers, we could put our gifts to practice, reciting poems, participating in music ministry, and preaching our first sermons. During the Soviet era, attending the worship of evangelical churches, including illegal gatherings, and participating in them, determined the identity and way of life of/for a believer to a much greater extent than nowadays. As various emotions and memories can be considered as a type of a personal document,¹⁰ such emotional and spiritual ties with the subject of study have influenced the approach and conclusions of the thesis, at least implicitly.

I should also note my personal and professional interest and involvement in the subject. As a participant in worship I am concerned for worship to be personally fulfilling and meaningful. As a Baptist minister I am interested in research on worship as I preach on a regular basis and take part in planning and conducting the worship. Furthermore, the subject is important for me as one of the leaders of the Belarusian Baptist Union and the Rector of the Seminary.

There is an advantage in such a connection with the subject of study, for in ethnographic research¹¹ it takes time to enter another culture and to understand it from the inside, while in this case these processes have already happened.¹² Being part of the group brings a particular kind of deep understanding.¹³ On the other hand, an insider's position impacts the selection of

⁹ See Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers, and Cas Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors* (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), p. 8.

¹⁰ Barbara Tedlock, "Ethnography and Ethnographic Representation," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin, and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2nd ed. (SAGE Publications, 2000): 460.

¹¹ For further discussion on ethnography, see section 4 of this chapter.

¹² In fact, Martin Denscombe notes, "the most popular development of ethnography in recent times has been its application to lifestyles, understanding and beliefs within 'our own' society" (Martin Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide for small-scale social research projects*, 2nd. ed. [Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003], p. 86).

¹³ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage

information. Familiarity with the topic can have a negative effect in that “one may miss out on perceiving its all too familiar characteristics.”¹⁴ Furthermore, my personal involvement inevitably influences my analysis and conclusions. “The emic point of view, or inside perspective, on the ritual is confronted with the 'outside'... the so-called 'etic' point of view.”¹⁵ I work as a researcher and at the same time I am a part of the phenomenon under study. I am involved in worship at different levels which can make it difficult to gain an emotional distance from the subject and to interpret it as impartially as possible. Personal interest and the value of the object for the researcher can indeed make evaluation and analysis more difficult. As Barbara Tedlock notes, “The oxymoron *participant observation* implies simultaneous emotional involvement and objective detachment. Ethnographers attempt to be both engaged participants and coolly dispassionate observers of the lives of others.”¹⁶

I have approached the current project keeping the difficulty of this tension in mind. I also hope that my use of academic tools has helped to minimize the risks as I have been continuously challenged in my understanding and interpretation of worship. “External audit”¹⁷ – that is, the questions and comments of teachers, fellow students and promoters – has kept this challenge at the fore throughout the study. Visiting public worship both in Protestant, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches has enlarged my vision and stimulated continuous reflection on my subjectivity.¹⁸ In this way, the emic and etic approaches have been continually and intentionally held in tension.

1.3. The Scope of the Study

Before exploring the geographical and temporal framework of this study it is necessary to provide a general overview of the region in the period under discussion – that is, from the second half of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the Russian Empire there was no such administrative unit as Belarus: it was a part of the Russian Empire (late 1800 – 1917), then of the Soviet Union, and Poland (the western part of Belarus in 1921–1939).¹⁹

publication, 2002), p. 268.

¹⁴ Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, p. 64.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁶ Tedlock, “Ethnography and Ethnographic Representation,” p. 465.

¹⁷ Corrine Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers. An Introduction*, 2nd. ed. (Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), p. 32.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *Bol'shaya sovetskaya entsyklopedia* [Big Soviet encyclopedia], vol. 3 (Moskva: “Sovetskaya entsyklopedia,” 1970), p. 388. *Bol'shaya entsyklopedia v 66 tomah* [Big encyclopedia in 66 vols.], vol. 5 (Moskva: “Terra,” 2006), p. 382. The Law of the Byelorussian SSR from 14.11.1939. https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/Закон_БССР_от_14.11.1939_Западная_Белоруссия, last accessed 14 May 2019. See also A. Latyshonak and Y. Miranovich, *Gistoryya Bielarusi ad syaredziny XVIII st. da pachatku XXI st.* [History of Belarus from the middle of the 17th century to the beginning of the 21st century] (Smalensk: “Inbelkult,” 2013), pp. 154-159.

Unified Byelorussia²⁰ became part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and remained so for over fifty years. In 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became an independent state and renamed itself the Republic of Belarus.

Whilst this dissertation analyses traditional worship in Baptist churches in Belarus, due to the close relationships between churches during the formation and development of the evangelical movement, a similar type/form of worship was common across the former Soviet Union from Brest to Vladivostok, and from St. Petersburg to Almaty. Baptist churches in Russia, Ukraine, Latvia and Estonia (Russian-speaking congregations), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and other republics followed, and a lot of them still follow, the same pattern, with only slight modifications. It is therefore possible to use the term *Russian-speaking Baptist worship* as a synonym for traditional worship in all those contexts.²¹ Furthermore, many Russian-speaking churches in the United States and elsewhere worship in this “traditional” way.²²

Indeed, given the lack of a more established status of the Belarusian language and national identity, one cannot point to a specific “Belarusian” Baptist type of worship.²³ As it stands now, the character of public Baptist worship has been more influenced by regional ties than by national identity. For example, meetings in southwestern Belarus are somewhat closer in spirit to meetings in northwestern Ukraine; these churches have more in common with each other than with the Belarusian churches in the north of Belarus. Geographic proximity and historical ties contribute to their close cooperation, mutual visits and participation in public worship.

Nevertheless, the main field of this research can be defined as the churches in Belarus, varied in their number and maturity. The vast majority of them belong to the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Belarus (UECBB)²⁴ and, whilst representing various geographical regions, it is especially concentrated in the south-western and central parts of the

²⁰ Here I employ “Byelorussia” instead of “Belarus,” as it was referenced in this way during the Soviet period.

²¹ On worship and preaching in Russian Baptist churches, see Timofey Cheprasov, “Formative? Informative? Neither? Towards understanding of the practice of proclamation, the core element of Russian Baptist Worship” (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2015), ch. 5. I have also witnessed this phenomenon personally in my own exposure to Soviet Baptist churches over a number of years. From 1993 to 1997 I was involved in worship nearly every Sunday in Russian churches, first of all in Moscow, whilst studying at Moscow Theological Seminary, and from 1997 I have regularly attended worship in Russian-speaking churches in Ukraine, Estonia, the United States, and Finland. I have also visited Russian-speaking churches in Kazakhstan (Almaty) and Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek, Kant).

²² Since 1988, hundreds of thousands of evangelical Christians have migrated to the United States of America from the former Soviet Union for economic, socio-political, religious and family reasons, establishing many Russian-speaking immigrant congregations across the country. For a study of how these immigrant churches function in their new cultural, social, and religious context, see Vyacheslav Tsvirinko, *Context and Contextuality. Towards an Authentic Mission Perspective for the Churches of the Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2018). Unfortunately, no study has so far been produced on Russian-speaking worship in diaspora.

²³ For further background, see Chapter 7.

²⁴ The Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Belarus, official website, <http://baptist.by>, last accessed 14 May 2019.

country. In 2018, UECBB had 252 churches. I have visited more than a hundred of them and took part in their worship; on about seventy of those occasions I took notes, observed the worship, took pictures and studied the worship space. Several times during my research I also visited two big influential independent churches in Brest, namely the Church on Fortechnaya 61/1 and the Church “Christmas,”²⁵ as well as four “unregistered” churches for the purposes of the study.²⁶ Visiting the churches was important not only in regard to collecting the facts, but also for a deeper understanding of the character of traditional worship. Texts of songs or prayers cannot convey the spirit of worship when they are in isolation from worship. The same songs are sung in different ways in different churches and prayers vary in their emotionality.

The main time-frame of this research took place between 2008–2017. Over this period of time the questionnaires were distributed among ministers and church members and results collected, notes from various worship services taken, interviews conducted and audio- and video-recordings of worship compiled.²⁷ The majority of the photographs of houses of prayer and their architecture belong to this period of time. However, researching the origins and development of the Baptist movement required embracing a period of more than a hundred years, beginning from late nineteenth century. At the same time special attention was given to the first third of the twentieth century, the time of intensive church growth, and to the last third of the twentieth century, the period of the dominance of Communism and the breakup of the

²⁵ There are around twenty-five Baptist churches in Belarus which are not part of formal church organizations. From 1987 to 1993 I was involved in the ministry of the church on Fortechnaya as a preacher, youth leader, and deacon.

²⁶ There were seventy-three such churches in 2015. “Unregistered,” “separated,” “initiators,” “Council of churches” are representative of several of the names of this movement among Russian-speaking Baptists which dates back to 1961. It emerged as a reaction to AUCECB’s adoption of two documents in 1959, the “Polozhenie o Soyuze evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR” [Regulations about ECB Union in USSR] and “Instruktivnoe pis’mo starshim presviteram VSEKhB” [Letter of Instruction to AUCECB Senior Pastors]. See http://baptistru.info/index.php?title=Инструктивное_письмо_и_Положение_ВСЕХБ, last accessed 12 April 2019. The letter was adopted by the December 1959 AUCECB Plenum. It was perhaps inspired by the CARC (Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults). The documents recommended restraining missionary and interchurch activity and following closely the Soviet Law about cult practice. Later, on October 15, 1963, an AUCECB Congress abolished the Letter, but the documents evoked widespread dissatisfaction, which resulted in splitting whole communities, or their parts, from the AUCECB later on. In 1965 a new Union was established: the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists (CCECB). Unlike AUCECB churches, CCECB congregations did not register with the authorities. After the breakup of the Soviet Union CCECB preserved its unity within the territory of the former Soviet Union. Later it adopted a new name of the International Council of Churches of ECB (ICCECB), uniting Evangelical Christian Baptists in the Commonwealth of Independent States, Baltic countries, Germany, USA, and Canada. One of its distinguishing characteristics has been avoiding any contact with the state. See Tatyana Nikol’skaya, “Kto takiye ‘otdelennyye’?” [Who are the ‘separated’?], *Mirt* [Myrtle], no. 5 (30) (2001): 1-2. <http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/1133416>, last accessed 16 July 2018; *Vestnik Istiny* [Herald of Truth], *Spiritually-edifying Journal of the CCECB*, no 4 (2001), p. 5. For an English-language study covering the split within the AUCECB, see Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II* (Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1981); Constantin Prokhorov, “The State and the Baptist Churches in the USSR (1960-1980)”, in., *Counter-Cultural Communities. Baptist Life in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. K.G. Jones and I.M. Randall (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008): 1-62.

²⁷ See audio- and video-records in Appendix 3. The records are limited to few churches, first of all “Light of Gospel” and “Golgotha” in Minsk, central Baptist church in Kobrin, and the church in Brest, Fortechnaya 61/1, which model worship for many churches.

Soviet Union, where I was also able to incorporate my personal experience of involvement in worship. The beginning of the twenty-first century presents a special interest in relation to the appearance of new styles and forms of worship, chiefly under Western (and particularly American) influence, conditioned by translations of new books in missiology and church structure into Russian, the involvement of Western teachers and preachers in spiritual education and church ministry, and spreading information on the World Wide Web.

1.4. Methodology

The research question guiding this dissertation has been the following: How is the implicit theology, as it is embodied in traditional Baptist worship in Belarus, related to understandings of established Baptist worship? To be more specific: How have the historical, political, religious, and theological contexts influenced this particular type of worship? How does the relationship between the implicit theology and traditional Baptist worship express itself in structure, content, spatial and temporal dimensions as well as in values which define the character of worship? What kind of conflicts have paramount importance for worship and what might be the avenues for a theological interpretation as well as reconciliation of the existing tensions between form and freedom, the communal and the personal aspect in worship, and traditional form of worship and contemporary culture?

In my consideration of theological patterns of Baptist worship, I largely follow the approach of a British Baptist theologian, Christopher Ellis. Ellis engages in a well-documented historical study, describing British Baptist worship.²⁸ In his case he pays special attention to the spirituality of worship. First of all he establishes “the liturgical facts,” “the facts of evolving practices,” taking into account the development of forms and their place in worship today.²⁹ Ellis believes that it is important in the beginning to learn “what happens, and happened, in worship.”³⁰ Then, following an Orthodox liturgist, Alexander Schmemmann, Ellis seeks to provide “the theological analysis of those liturgical facts,”³¹ exploring “core worship values which influence worship or are expressed in it.”³² His next step is to draw out the implicit theology underlying a particular expression of worship. This exploration “enables the theology implicit in worship to have a voice.”³³ The fourth step for Ellis is to “place the exposition of the faith of the

²⁸ Ellis, *Gathering*.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. See Alexander Schmemmann, “Liturgical Theology: Remarks on Method,” in *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed. T. Fisch (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982/1990): 144.

³² Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 97.

³³ Ibid., p. 24.

worshipping community under a broader theological scrutiny.”³⁴ Here we engage with “other theological expressions of faith,” “such as creeds, confession of faith, analytical theology and, especially, Scripture.”³⁵ In this work I seek to demonstrate how the logic of Ellis’s approach is applied to a different Baptist culture, and thus do not follow closely the structure of his book. After extended historical study with close attention to the context in Part I, I establish “liturgical facts” in Part II, proceeding with the values which “shape the worship.”³⁶ This enables an exploration of both the visible side of worship as well as what is behind the scenes. In Part III, which combines steps three and four as suggested by Ellis, several spheres are considered, where the theology implicit in worship is in tension with theology expressed in confessions or other theological expressions of faith. The critical analysis of worship allows for a clarifying theology of worship to emerge against which its practice can be developed and changed.

The method of research is interdisciplinary. It is a combination of the study of history and literature, field research, and theological analysis, integrated into one framework of research by the main research question and the specific phenomenon under exploration.³⁷ In the first part I explore sources relevant/related to the origin and development of the evangelical movement and worship service in Belarus, theological, religious, and political contexts and their influence in the process of formation. The primary concern here is to understand the worship of the Baptist community through the process of historical enquiry and theological reflection.³⁸ A substantive historical examination of the subject raised issues concerning the clashes of different cultures and the influence of context in the process of worship formation. Significant use has been made of such primary sources as archive documents, hymnals, autobiographies and memoirs, newspaper and magazine articles, confessions, reports from conferences and congresses and government documents. Secondary sources, such as books on history, theses and reference materials, shed further light on the context and key events that have come to shape Belarusian Baptist worship.

The historical research paves the way for an in-depth understanding of the current shape of worship which is the focus of the second part of this dissertation. Here ethnographical

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid. This approach resonates with the theological framework of James McClendon, who suggests that the task of theology is the “discovery, understanding or interpretation, and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community, including the discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another **and to whatever else there is.**” (McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 23. Emphasis in original.)

³⁶ Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 73.

³⁷ David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE 2013), p. 6. According to Ellis in such a study, “A number of different disciplines may be used in the study of worship – from historical research to ethnographic observation, from liturgical analysis to theological reflection.” (Christopher Ellis, “Duty and Delight: Baptist Worship and Identity,” *Review and Expositors*, vol. 100, no. 3 [Summer, 2003]: 330.)

³⁸ Cf. Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 34.

research has been of particular use, primarily differing degrees of participant observation.³⁹ Prolonged time in observation has enabled myself as a researcher to take note of any significant patterns of change.⁴⁰ Immersing myself in worship, and forming and maintaining relationships with other participants, has been directed at the “understanding [of] the meaning of human action”⁴¹ – in this case, the meaning bestowed on the practice of worship.⁴² As I engage in the thick description of one of the practices “that shape and are shaped”⁴³ by people, much attention is paid to context, values, and the definition of the character of worship as the phenomenon under consideration.

Qualitative research can be combined with some elements of quantitative research. In this way we can “think of quantitative and qualitative approaches as complementary parts of the systematic, empirical search for knowledge.”⁴⁴ Employing triangulation has allowed for the use of different methods for collecting the data.⁴⁵ This approach allows one to do a more precise research of public worship as a social phenomenon, and it strengthens the credibility and validity of the results, taking into the account that each method has its strong and weak points. Validity of the conclusions of qualitative methods can be influenced by the researcher’s personality and his or her professional training. At the same time quantitative methods do not pay as much attention to context and personal characteristics of a particular group. In this way, application of complementary and independent methods compensates for their faults. In-depth understanding of the experience of an individual participant or a specific phenomenon is complemented by the broad coverage, in terms of a significant number of churches and public worship services presented in the study, which suggests a typical experience or phenomenon.

Questionnaires⁴⁶ typically belong to quantitative research. In this dissertation, they have shaped the definition and description of the structure, characteristics and tendencies in worship

³⁹ Since levels of participation can vary, Tim May suggests using narrower terms, such as “complete participant,” “participant as observer,” and “observer as participant.” (Tim May, *Social Researcher. Issues, Methods and Process*, 2nd ed. [Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1997], p. 140). In my practice of visiting churches these terms could accordingly mean a person who is involved in worship as a leader and preacher, or who joins with church singing and prayer or who is involved as a listener. On different ways of engaging in worship see section 7.2.1.

⁴⁰ David M. Fetterman, “Ethnography,” in., *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, ed. Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Alan Bryman, and Tim Futing Liao, vol. 1. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE 2004): 328.

⁴¹ Thomas A. Schwandt, *The SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE 2007), p. 248.

⁴² John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design. Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007), p. 71. On ethnography and fieldwork, see the discussion in Schwandt, *The SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry*, p. 96, and Margarete Sandelowski, “Qualitative research,” in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, ed. Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Alan Bryman, and Tim Futing Liao, vol. 1 (Thousand Oaks: SAGE 2004): 893-894.

⁴³ Sandelowski, “Qualitative research,” pp. 893-894.

⁴⁴ Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, p. 9.

⁴⁵ Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers. An Introduction*, p. 32. Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, p. 247.

⁴⁶ Detailed description of the questionnaires is presented in the following section.

formation. However, the researcher needs to understand the meaning that the participants attribute to certain actions⁴⁷ and the meaning these actions acquire in a particular context.⁴⁸ Martin Stringer, for example, pays attention to three moments in the research: ‘what a person says they should be doing’, ‘what they say they are doing’, and ‘what they are actually doing’.⁴⁹ What people say they are doing, and what is their understanding of what they should be doing, can be discovered through questionnaires and interviews. Observation may confirm or disprove the facts. That is why textual analysis, written questionnaires, interviews and structured interviews, recording, keeping field notes, and conversations should be complemented by observation of the course of worship, of the actions of worshippers, and their reaction to what is going on.⁵⁰

Active involvement in worship may distract from the analytical task. As time goes by, the ethnographer becomes “saturated” with the practice of worship, which can make it more difficult for them to notice the details that might grab the attention of a newcomer. Here notepads, cameras and video cameras, and audio recording equipment, due to their “*density* and *permanence*” (emphasis in original) become the researcher's friend.⁵¹ The density allows the researcher to watch closely every element and participant, pay attention to body language, follow the words of a prayer or sermon, or count the number of Scriptures read out loud in worship (as I did for churches “Golgotha” and “Light of Gospel” in Minsk). Also, it is very helpful for a thick description. Permanence is expressed in the extension of the time frame of study. Listening to the records of worship or watching them in the office while constantly addressing the research framework, and having opportunity to stop and go back, helps to extract new layers of information, which is very important in a thick description, and to check the results of the conclusions that have already been made. In addition, it helps to abstract, look at the worship “from the outside,” which is critical for the ethnographer immersed in the subject of study. Given that large churches make their own video or audio recordings of worship, it has been possible to use the fruit of their work (with their permission) to expand the geography of research or compare the worship of the same church. However, most of the visuals have been recorded by myself on a phone camera. The quality has been sufficient for the analysis and conclusions made in the section 4.2. Space in public worship.

⁴⁷ Mirella Klomp, *The Sound of Worship* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), p. 72.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴⁹ Martin D. Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship. The ethnography of worship in four Christian congregations in Manchester* (Birmingham: The University of Birmingham, 1999), p. 50.

⁵⁰ Klomp, *The Sound of Worship*, p. 80.

⁵¹ Anna Madil, “Ethnography,” in *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. Lisa M. Given, vol. 1 (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2008), p. 291. Also see Barbara E. Gibson, “Videorecording,” in Lisa M. Given, ed., *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, vol. 2 (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2008): 916-918.

The data received may require clarification and even a change in the approach to the collection of material, since “ethnographic research is a reflexive and cyclical process.”⁵² An ethnographer checks their conclusions both in the light of new information and by constant evaluation of the influence of “our own culture, social background and personal experiences.”⁵³ In this case reflection had to be carried out concerning the multiple ties I had with the subject: convictions and beliefs, personal and academic interests, involvement and experience, education and qualifications, and so forth.⁵⁴ Self-reflexivity requires responding to such questions as “What do I know? How do I know what I know? What shapes my perceptions and has my background affected the data I have collected and my analysis of those data? How do I perceive those I have studied?”⁵⁵ For example, careful consideration had/needed to be given to the fact that I am a leader of the Baptist Union and Seminary and I am involved in setting the Union policy concerning worship. This was particularly important in considering the way the information was to be collected by questionnaires and interviews, so that participants did not feel any pressure to respond in any particular way and understood their right to cease their participation in the project. I also needed to think about my participation in worship not only as an insider, but insider who carries a certain degree of power which can influence the worship experience of other participants.

The work of the ethnographer does not stop at the accumulation of information. At the next level the ethnographer “translates this material to make it intelligible to other people by giving a sorted, contextualized description.”⁵⁶ The study of worship in this dissertation concentrates on the structure, content, and temporal and spatial aspects of worship. Less attention is paid to the analysis of the behavior of worship participants and the study of individual components, such as music. Whilst an in-depth investigation of these topics would likely shed further light on the theology of traditional Baptist worship, this could not be achieved within the scope of this thesis. Instead, I have concentrated on what emerged as the key aspects for interpreting the phenomenon under consideration.

The accumulation and processing of information allowed the hypotheses regarding the values and beliefs of the worshipers as determining the form, structure, content and design of worship space to be tested and developed further. Simplicity, the importance of the Bible, edification, and the missiological perspective of worship could be classified as such values or

⁵² Klomp, *The Sound of Worship*, p. 75. See also Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide for small-scale social research projects*, p. 88.

⁵³ Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide for small-scale social research projects*, p. 90. Also see Russel Ogden, “Bias,” in Given, *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, pp. 60-61.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, p. 495.

⁵⁶ Klomp, *The Sound of Worship*, p. 74; Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, p. 54.

emphases. Alongside the analysis of the information acquired through questionnaires, and exploration of the documents and texts related to this particular form of worship, participant observation⁵⁷ continued to play an important role at this stage.

The third part of this work deals with the problem of discrepancies or tensions between form and freedom, the communal and the personal aspect in worship, and traditional forms of worship and culture today, conditioned by the context of formation. There is “an *implicit* theology embodied in worship,”⁵⁸ which manifests itself in the expectation of believers, their reactions, emotions and understanding,⁵⁹ the participants' behavior, the sequence and content of the components, and there is also an official understanding which is expressed in confessions, articles and manuals, and ministers' statements. Inspired by an approach Ellis sets out in one of his articles,⁶⁰ I have explored contradictions between worship in its empirical shape and some of the key tenets of Baptist teaching on worship, or between “primary” and “secondary” theology.⁶¹ This method, aimed at the study of internal contradictions, can be called a dialectical method. It is applied both to individual components, such as prayer, and to the content of the worship service as a whole, to the participants and the relationship between church and society. In Ellis's opinion “to describe Christian worship dialectically . . . can be both creative and illuminating as a theological method.”⁶² In fact, I began to sense such tensions before becoming acquainted with Ellis's work, and the latter has helped me to clarify and refine my own approach and confidence to continue in this direction.

Reflections on discrepancies in worship opens the door for constructive critique and for proposals for reducing the existing tensions. At the same time the idea of “creative tension”⁶³ is developed here. Such dynamic tension is one of the main reasons for the continuous internal development of worship. Therefore, the emphasis is not on completely overcoming the conflict, but rather on using its energy to improve practice and unleash the potential of worship. The

⁵⁷ Cf. Pete Ward, ed., *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), p. 8. Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener think that “Liturgical ritual must be understood in the first place within its cultural and anthropological contexts, that is, within its immediate and wider cultural context, as well as from its anthropological context, that is, from the perspective of its participants or performers.” (Barnard et. al., *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, p. 39.)

⁵⁸ Ellis, *Gathering*, pp. 33-34.

⁵⁹ Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, p. 43; Klomp, *The Sound of Worship*, p. 74.

⁶⁰ Ellis, “Gathering Struggles: Creative Tensions in Baptist Worship,” *The Baptist Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 1 (2007): 4-21.

⁶¹ Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 248. Ellis's ideas of tensions in worship and values, which shape the worship, help to group and sort out a large amount of material obtained in the process of the research. Other helpful works in systematization and evaluation of the information are Keith G. Jones and Parush P. Parushev, eds., *Currents in Baptist Theology of Worship Today* (Praha: IBTS, 2007); David W. Bebbington, “Evangelicals and public worship, 1965-2005,” *Evangelical Quarterly*, 79-1 (2007): 3-22.

⁶² Ibid., p. 34.

⁶³ This phrase appears in the title of Ellis's article “Gathering Struggles: Creative Tensions in Baptist Worship.”

approach requires engaging inner resources of local worship, and the use of resources from other traditions of worship that are able to enrich worship in Baptist churches in Belarus.

As Ellis devotes little space to culture and its relationship to worship, in the section focused on the relevance of worship to the secular context, I engage with a theological model from the reformed theologian John Witvliet, and particularly his call to liturgical inculturation.⁶⁴ I begin by examining the cultural environment of worship and the relationships of worship and culture. This is followed by a critical assessment of the cultural context and defining extremes, which should be avoided in attempts to adapt or completely reject elements of the local culture. Evaluation of other traditions of worship helps to understand how “common elements” of Christian worship can be expressed through local worship, avoiding their mechanical repetition. Searching for native equivalents for individual components of worship, possibly by transforming the forms that have been available in a culture, preserves worship uniqueness, and defining basic or common elements characteristic of all Christian tradition preserves worship identity.⁶⁵

1.5. Analysis of resources

Historical Documents

The subject matter and the methodology required an employment of a wide range of resources. A considerable contribution to the studies of the origins of the evangelical movement and worship formation in Belarus was made by archive research, primarily in the National Archive of Republic of Belarus and to the lesser degree in the National Historical Archive of Belarus. The latter holds such documents as the protocols of a police bailiff, reports of district police officers, event reports from the governor, reports of priests and archbishops, information from the governor's office and circulars from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Mogilev diocesan bulletins, and many others. In the National Archive, the documents of the Council for Religious Affairs are of special value as they contain applications and complaints of Christians, memoranda of authorized representatives, and materials about the activity of religious communities. As with any study of persecuted groupings, the shortcoming of such archives is that they mainly deal with evidences provided by the believers' persecutors and adversaries, such as reports from the police and authorized representatives, and materials of official propaganda. Nevertheless, they provide many useful facts and insights.

The repertoire of primary sources is completed by evangelical materials related to the origins and spreading of Baptist faith. CDs with selections of documents (and modern research

⁶⁴ John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

⁶⁵ Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, pp. 109-123.

works) produced by Euro-Asian Accrediting Association,⁶⁶ cannot be overestimated in this regard. For example, the first CD contains two thousand primary sources on a wide spectrum of the evangelical movement that arose in imperial Russia in the middle of the nineteenth century, including memoirs of key figures of the Evangelical movement, approximately one hundred and fifty interviews, pictures, maps, texts and photocopies of books and journals, state documents, and church or personal archives. However, these documents provide little information on how the evangelical movement spread into the immediate territory of Belarus; their main focus is on the first sites of Baptist origins in the Russian Empire: the Caucasus, Southern Ukraine and St. Petersburg.

Books on the history of the evangelical movement in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union written in Russian and in English, and in some cases in Belarusian and Polish, have been used as auxiliary material. Among the first of these I should note *The History of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the USSR*.⁶⁷ This work was prepared and published by AUCECB, summarized a number of sources and “introduced many new sources and facts into readership circulation, exposing the past of the Baptist movement with scrupulousness as never before.”⁶⁸ A fundamental work by Wilhelm Kahle⁶⁹ deserves attention, as well as a recently published book by Andrei Puzynin.⁷⁰ The works by Heather Coleman and Toivo Pilli⁷¹ are the most valuable among the materials in English. Even though Pilli focuses on a Baptist movement in Estonia, the connection between the churches in the Soviet Union and the similar political context make his work a good source for comparison and evaluation. The works of western historians and theologians have been used for broader understanding of Baptist heritage and identity, and they include Thomas McKibbens, Ian Randall, Albert Wardin, W.T. Whitley, Philip Thompson,⁷² and others.

⁶⁶ *Istoriya Evangel'skogo dvizheniya v Evrazii* [History of the Evangelical Movement in Eurasia], Primary sources, CD-ROM, 1.1., 2.0., 3.0., 4.0. Euro-Asian Accrediting Association, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005.

⁶⁷ *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR* (Moskva: Izdaniye Vsesoyuznogo soveta evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov, 1989).

⁶⁸ L.N. Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost'* [Baptists: History and Modernity] (Saint-Peterburg: Russkiy khristianskiy gosudarstvennyy institut, 1997), p. 190. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Polish in this dissertation are mine.

⁶⁹ Kahle, *Evangel'skie khristiane v Rossii i Sovetskom Soyuze*.

⁷⁰ Puzynin, *Tradiciya evangel'skikh khristian. Izucheniye samoidentifikatsii i bogosloviya ot momenta ee zarozhdeniya do nashih dnei*.

⁷¹ Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists & Spiritual Revolution 1905-1929* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005); Toivo Pilli, “Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Estonia: The Shaping of Identity, 1945-1991” (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2007), p. 253.

⁷² Thomas R. McKibbens, Jr., “Our Baptist Heritage in Worship,” *Review and Expositors*, vol. LXXX, no. 1, (Winter, 1983): 53-70; Ian M. Randall, Toivo Pilli and Anthony R. Cross, *Baptist Identities. Studies in Baptist History and Thoughts*, vol. 27 (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006); Albert W. Wardin, Jr., “How Indigenous was the Baptist Movement in the Russian Empire,” *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 9, no. 2 (Jan. 2009): 29-37; W.T. Whitley, ed., *The Works of John Smyth*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915); Philip E. Thompson, “Re-envisioning Baptist Identity: Historical, Theological, and Liturgical Analysis,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, vol. 27, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 287-303.

A significant body of literature contains Orthodox, Russian (until 1917) and Soviet historiography. There are many books of this type in the National Library of the Republic of Belarus. Much of the valuable evidence and a good analysis can be found in the research of the Russian historian A.I. Milovidov,⁷³ and archpriest A.V. Rozhdestvensky.⁷⁴ It is worth mentioning L.N. Mitrokhin, M.Y. Lensu and E.S. Prokshina among the Soviet writers, whose works were already published in the second half of the twentieth century.⁷⁵ However, in Tsarist Russia and in Soviet times, most of the authors were prejudiced against the Baptists and other evangelical groups, considering them to be an instrument of Germanisation, agents of Western imperialism, perceiving them as fanatics and harmful relics of the past. “Extreme bias”⁷⁶ is especially typical of the literature published during the late 1920s and 1930s, and then in the 1950s and 1960s; issues of partisanship decided/affected scientific ‘objectivity.’ The objectivity of the thesis by respected modern Belarusian scholar, Tatsiana Lisovskaya, stands out as being of great advantage in this regard.⁷⁷

Ethnographic data

The second part of my dissertation is devoted to the exposition of the phenomenon of worship. I have been able to explore traditional Baptist worship as an immediate participant and observer. Besides personal observations, impressions, and informal interaction, much information was received concerning church worship, primarily as a result of the questionnaires and structured interviews conducted over the course of several years and covering churches in different regions of Belarus, but reflecting the fact that most churches are concentrated in the Brest region and in Minsk. Firstly, by random selection and stratification by region, churches of different sizes were singled out that represented the capital, urban and rural settings. Questionnaires⁷⁸ were offered to one pastor or one preacher from each church.⁷⁹ I contacted these “gatekeepers” or “key informants”⁸⁰ in person or by telephone about filling in the forms.

⁷³ A.I. Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundobaptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae* [Modern Stundo-Baptist Movement in the North-Western Region] (Vilnius: Russkiy pochini, 1910).

⁷⁴ A. Rozhdestvensky, *Yuzhnorusskiy Shtundizm* [Southruussian Shtundism] (Sanct Peterburg: Tipografiya Departamenta Udelov, 1889). Rozhdestvensky wrote about Southruussian Shtundism, which corresponds to the current territory of southern Ukraine. This movement did however contribute to the development of the evangelical movement in the south-east and east of Belarus. In addition, this work deserves attention as an example of the comprehensive systematization and analysis of the material under research.

⁷⁵ Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost'*; M.Y. Lensu and E.S. Prokshina, eds., *Baptizm i Baptisty. Sotsiologicheskii ocherk* [Baptism and Baptists. Sociological Digest] (Minsk: “Nauka i tekhnika,” 1969).

⁷⁶ Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost'*, p. 23.

⁷⁷ Lisovskaya, *Neoprottestantizm v Zapadnoi Belarusi v 1921-1939 gg.*

⁷⁸ Q, 2008, *Questionnaire of church ministers* (January, 2008).

⁷⁹ I should note that, given my personal history and role in ministry, personal acquaintance and good, trustful relations were one of the factors enabling the extent of this research. As Corrine Glesne observes, “relationship between researchers and people plays an important role” (Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers. An Introduction*, p. 43). In the researching and receiving of information, relating to a researcher who is considered to be a “trusted person” (Ibid., p. 43) provides a lot of information, including negative aspects of local worship practices that ministers and church members would not share with an outside researcher.

⁸⁰ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design. Choosing Among Five Approaches*, p. 71.

Instructions on how to fill out the questionnaire and contact information were provided to the participants—mailing address, telephone number and email address—which informants could use when they had any questions or were ready to return their questionnaires. In 2008, information was received from five large churches (four to seven hundred members),⁸¹ including “Golgotha,” the central Baptist church in Minsk, which celebrated its one hundred and tenth anniversary in 2012; five average-size churches (fifty to one hundred members); and four small ones (up to thirty members). The goal of the first study was to gather general information about worship services, their structure, content, physical environment, and distinct features. For the most part the respondents answered open-ended questions, designed to explain both facts and reveal the opinions of the respondents. For example: “What Bible texts are decorating the walls/pulpit/pictures in your house of prayer (give the reference)? Are the texts replaced for some occasions?” and “What are the main problems of sermons (if there are any)?” So the questions were not only about the facts and the knowledge of the worshippers but also about their evaluation, feelings, experience and perception of the subject.⁸² Four out of the eighteen churches did not respond. The information from the questionnaires was digitalized and saved along with the digital questionnaires. The hard copies of the questionnaires are preserved in Minsk Theological Seminary.

Whilst the number of these questionnaires was relatively small, it was followed by prolonged engagement and extended time in the field, and another set of questionnaires which engaged lay people of various ages, both men and women. This aspect of the study, which could be identified as structured interviews administered in writing, was conducted in 2012.⁸³ The questions were focused on clarifying theological issues related to worship and inviting an analysis of the situation, for example, “How could the participation of many people (everybody volunteering) be reconciled with the importance of the edification of the church?” In addition, there were structured interviews for ministers in 2008, individual church members in 2008 and 2012, and Seminary students in 2013,⁸⁴ which, although limited in scale,⁸⁵ provide a window into “what real people think about their worship and how ordinary churchgoers respond to what happens every Sunday morning in their churches.”⁸⁶

⁸¹ There are no such big church congregations in the Vitebsk, Grodno and Mogilev regions, which are three out of six regions in Belarus.

⁸² Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers. An Introduction*, p. 71.

⁸³ SI, 2012, *Structured interview of church ministers and members* (September, 2012).

⁸⁴ Respectively SI, 2008, *Structured interview of church pastors. Theological Assessment* (October, 2008); QM, 2008, *Questionnaire of church members* (January, 2008); QM, 2012, *Questionnaire of church members* (October, 2012); Q, 2013, *Questionnaire of Seminary's students* (November, 2013).

⁸⁵ An average 10–12 interviews per set.

⁸⁶ Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, p. 1. Stringer argued, “the meaning of any act of worship existed primarily within the minds of the worshippers who attended the rite and had very little to do with the specifics of the text or the actions of the liturgy being used.” Later he came to the conclusion, “that the ‘answer’, so far as there

Summarizing the results requires cautiousness in making conclusions and evaluations, perceiving the information only as an “attempt to discover an authentic voice.”⁸⁷ David Silverman asks a fair question: “How far did my respondents’ answers to my prepared questions actually reflect their own experiences?”⁸⁸ Some respondents may treat the questionnaires and structured interviews casually and may try to respond to them hastily. Others may try to present their church practice in its best light while some others may be critically minded. Thus, the issue of reliability always remains, and the value of observation and the researcher’s own involvement is equally important in the process. In order to confirm and clarify some assumptions and details, other sources of information could be consulted, such as private or informal conversations with theology students, musicians, choir members, pastors and ordinary believers. (Indeed, learning to listen well to others’ stories and to interpret and retell the accounts is part of the qualitative researcher’s trade.⁸⁹) Such conversations help to understand better the influence of worship, the connection between worship and life, and worshippers’ individual and collective experiences.⁹⁰

Theological materials

It is hard to imagine a study of worship without an analysis of liturgical texts. But as already noted, there are only few items directly associated with the traditional Baptist worship: namely, the Bible, hymnal(s), and collections of poetry. There are neither prayer books nor written texts or directions for Communion, funerals, weddings, ordinations, baptisms, offerings, special days of the Christian year or regular worship occasions. However, there are still some other useful items that have indirect relation to worship services. *Bratskiy Vestnik* magazine is an indispensable resource for the study and analysis of Russian-speaking Baptist worship, as it was the only legal Baptist magazine published bi-monthly from 1945 to 1993.⁹¹ (In 2005, the publication was relaunched as a press organ of the Euro-Asian Federation of the Unions of Evangelical Christians-Baptists).⁹² In the Soviet era this publication united churches and

is an answer, must lie somewhere between the text and the minds of the worshippers who use the text.” (Ibid., p. 2.) The ratio between the role of the text and the condition of worshipper could vary significantly depending on church and individual personality but the voice of public worship participants should be heard in the process of worship analysis. See Klomp, *The Sound of Worship*, p. 74.

⁸⁷ Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, p. 8.

⁸⁸ Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, p. 8.

⁸⁹ Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers. An Introduction*, p. 1.

⁹⁰ About informal conversational interview see Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, p. 342-343. Such informal conversations are characterized by flexibility and spontaneity, and they can be done if persons are acquainted with each other, work together, visit churches, meet at conferences and work with pastors.

⁹¹ [Fraternal Messenger] (Moskva: VSEKhB). Initially, the magazine's circulation was three thousand copies, from 1957 it increased to five thousand copies, and from 1979 to ten thousand. From late 1949 to 1952 inclusive, the magazine was not published. See *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, p. 278; Tatstsyana Kasataya, “Samvydat evangel'skikh khrystyian-baptystau u BSSR” [Samizdat of Evangelical Christian Baptists in the Byelorussian SSR], *ARCHE beginning*, no. 3 (2017): 196. Even though the number of magazine copies was small, they were personally handed from one person to another, judging by the experience of our family, which means that the number of Christian readers was considerably more significant than the number of copies.

⁹² See all issues of the magazine on the website of the Moscow Central Church of the ECB. http://mbchurch.ru/publications/brotherly_pdf/, last accessed 15 May 2019.

evangelical groups, and in the absence of other theological resources and means of communication it is difficult to overstate its role. The leadership of AUCECB considered “proper formation” of church members “both from spiritual and the civil point of view”⁹³ as the main objective of the magazine. The magazine covered various issues of church life, published sermons, articles for Christian edification, commentaries on biblical texts, information about how the leadership of the Union and regional units visited churches, and what decisions the Union made. Many communities practiced communal reading of the magazine, such as reading it aloud before the start of a worship service. Nevertheless, it was an official publication, and it was controlled by the Soviet authorities, so a considerable part of information about the life of churches was avoided, especially regarding forced closing of churches, arrests, and the activity of unregistered churches.⁹⁴ But its spiritual influence, in an atmosphere of almost complete absence of other literature and information sources, was felt far beyond Moscow. To provide a personal example, my brothers and I used *Bratskiy Vestnik* in preparation of our sermons when we were only 14–18 years old, making use of the “Meditations for Preachers” by Karev, one of the most productive authors of the magazine.⁹⁵

A key resource from theological and analytical point of view is the literature in English on the theology of worship, or Liturgical Theology. First of all, these are the books and articles of Christopher Ellis, John Witvliet, and Alexander Schmemmann. Other authors who analyze worship from different perspectives—Methodist, Reformed, Lutheran⁹⁶—have made a great contribution to the understanding of the theology of worship. Their works present tools and methodology for the study of worship, which, due to lack of research on the topic, are needed in the Russian-speaking evangelical tradition.

⁹³ *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 3 (1969), p. 65.

⁹⁴ T.U. Kasataya, “Evangel'skiya khrystsiyane-baptisty ý BSSR u 1944 – pachatku 1950-kh gg” [Evangelical Christian Baptists in USSR in 1944– the beginning of 1950s], *ARCHE*, no. 1-2 (2012): 144; Alexander Popov, “The Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the Soviet Union as a hermeneutical community: examining the identity of the All-Union Council of the ECB (AUCECB) through the way the Bible was used in its publications” (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2010).

⁹⁵ Alexander Vasil'evich Karev (1894–1971) was a pastor, preacher, Christian writer and theologian, as well as the General Secretary of AUCECB and the chief editor of *Bratskiy Vestnik* magazine (1944–1971).

Timofey Cheprasov offers an informative overview of articles on preaching that appeared on the pages of the *Bratskiy Vestnik*. He claims, “The importance and influence of this media is difficult to overestimate, since until 1968 when the Bible Correspondent Courses (BCC) started to work, the only resource available to churches and individual preachers were publications in the *BV* [*Bratskiy Vestnik*].” (Timofey Cheprasov, *Like Ripples on Water* [Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & STOCK, 2018], p. 51.)

⁹⁶ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (London: Epworth Press, 1980); *Worship Old & New: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Paul Waitman Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971); James White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989); Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*; Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); Jean-Jacques von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965).

Along with the western scholars we should note contemporary indigenous Russian and Ukrainian scholars, including Seventh Day Adventist Victor Leahu, and Baptist Mikhail Cherenkov.⁹⁷ The picture is complemented by the recently written dissertations at the International Baptist Theological Seminary, such as the work of Timofey Cheprasov, who explored preaching in the Russian-speaking context, and Constantine Prokhorov, who studied the influence of Orthodoxy on the practice of Baptist churches in Russia. They worked in similar contexts and demonstrated excellent results on the analysis of the practice of preaching, theological identity and how it was shaped, as well as of the praxis of worship among Russian Baptists.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Victor Leahu, “K voprosu o vzaimodeistvii teologii bogoslužheniya i teologii kul’tury v liturgicheskom opyte neoprottestantizma” [On the Interaction of Theology of Liturgy and Theology of Culture in the Liturgical Experience of Neoprottestantism], in *Bogoslovie i bogoslovskoe obrazovanie v sovremennom obshchestve. Material konferencii Bogoslovskogo obshchestva Evrazii* [Theology and Theological Education in Modern Society. Conference Material of the Theological Society of Eurasia] (Odessa: Euro-Asian Accrediting Association (EAAA), 2002): 46; M.M. Cherenkov, *Evropeis’ka rephormaciya ta ukrain’sky evangel’sky Protestantism: Genetiko-tipologichna sporidnenist’ i natsional’no-identifikatsiiny vymiry suchasnosti* [European Reformation and Ukrainian Protestantism: Genetic and Typological Relations and National Identity Measurements of Modernity] (Odessa: “Khristiyan’ska prosvita,” 2008), p. 300; and other books and articles.

⁹⁸ Cheprasov, “Formative? Informative? Neither? Towards understanding of the practice of proclamation, the core element of Russian Baptist Worship;” Constantine Prokhorov, “Russian Baptist and Orthodoxy, 1960-1990: A Comparative Study of Theology, Liturgy, and Traditions” (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2011). Subsequently published as Cheprasov, *Like Ripples on Water* and Constantine Prokhorov, *Russian Baptists and Orthodoxy, 1960-1990* (Cumbria, Carlisle: Langham Monograph, 2013).

PART 1. FORMATION: EXPLORING THE PAST AND THE CONTEXT

CHAPTER 2. THE ROLE OF PUBLIC WORSHIP IN THE BELARUSIAN BAPTIST CONTEXT

2.1. A source of spiritual life in difficult times

Worship has always played a prominent role in the life of Evangelical Christian Baptists, performing a preparatory and hermeneutical function in relation to the everyday experiences of believers. Together with a distinct ethical and outward appearance,⁹⁹ public worship has been the principal manifestation of belonging to the church. Describing their attendance of worship, AUCECB senior pastors and leaders would use such lofty descriptions as “extraordinary meeting of the redeemed,”¹⁰⁰ “blessed prayer meetings,”¹⁰¹ “solemn divine service,”¹⁰² or “blessed hours in the joyful communion like on Mount Tabor.”¹⁰³ It would not be uncommon to note that those who attended “listened to our word with sublime delight,”¹⁰⁴ and though “the meeting lasted for three hours, nobody wanted to leave.”¹⁰⁵ A well-known hymn “Vot nastal molitvy chas” (Time Has Come For Us To Pray), frequently performed before the start of the worship service, illustrates the reverent attitude:

Time has come for us to pray.
Faith shall bring us near,
At the feet of Christ we lay
Sin and all our fears.
 This we have to know in faith:
 He extends His embrace
 Sending His abundant blessings
 Unto us all the days.
Wondrous prayer time!
Wondrous prayer time!
Sweetest fellowship, it can be no sweeter!

⁹⁹ It is possible to read about the behavior and experience of the Baptists from the point of view of secular researchers in the books by Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptizm i Baptisty. Sotsiologicheskii ocherk* and Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost'*. The authors of the first book, which was published in 1969, study the history of Baptists in Belarus. On the basis of sociological materials they cover various sides of Baptist psychology and their moral ideals. The book by Mitrokhina was published in 1997 and the author is concerned with the dogmatic and morals of Christians and their “living” religious experience. It is also very interesting to study the practice of creating a family, from the ethical point of view it is one of the most fundamental issues in the context of opposing “worldly” morality. Ekaterina Mironova, “Predstavleniya o brake i brachnyye praktiki yevangel'skikh veruyushchikh v Sovetskom Soyuze v 1940–1980-ye gg. Po materialam obshchin yevangel'skikh khristian-baptistov tsentral'no-chernozemnogo regiona” [Marriage Ideas and Practices among Evangelical Believers in the Soviet Union in 1940-1980s. The Case of Central Black Earth Region], *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* [State, Religion and Church in Russia and Abroad], no. 36 (2) (2018): 131-162.

¹⁰⁰ *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 1 (1945), p. 44.

¹⁰¹ *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 3 (1945), p. 15.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰³ *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 1 (1946), p. 43.

¹⁰⁴ *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 3 (1948), p. 52.

¹⁰⁵ *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 6 (1947), p. 48.

Taking part in worship is considered by Baptists to be an experience of joy and satisfaction, and also of receiving food for one's soul, power to gain victory over sin, wisdom to solve everyday problems, answers to the hard issues of life, encouragement in despondency, and a spiritual supply of energy to live in the secular milieu during the coming week. To inspire each other, Baptists would sing, "We found encouragement in the words of the Lord, so we may go forth with new strength."¹⁰⁷ In the words of one Baptist woman,

During the prayer service I get charged with power and more faith in God. It may be compared to a light bulb that feeds on a battery. Just as with time going on a battery loses power and it needs to be charged again, so do we. A week goes by and we need to be recharged. For a week we are busy with secular matters, work and care. We seem to be utterly consumed by our surroundings but on a day for public worship we get recharged and our faith grows stronger. . . On Sunday it is impossible to stay home. You are just pulled to the house of prayer. My soul sings and joy flows.¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, as preachers often warn, disregard for a worship service is understood to eventually lead to spiritual coolness and going astray from the church and faith. Admonitions to be zealous in attending public worship are often accompanied by examples and illustrations. A typical analogy compares Christian worship to a burning coal. If a burning coal falls out of a stove, it will soon become cold. Likewise, if the Christian is all by themselves, without fellowship with other Christians, they will grow cold and die spiritually.

Church members who are absent from worship services for several months without a reasonable cause can be disciplined to the degree of admonition, or reprimand¹⁰⁹ and even excommunication.¹¹⁰ Official ECB documents, referring to multiple Scriptural texts, mainly in

¹⁰⁶ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 2, first stanza and refrain. The songs and poems in the Introduction and Chapter 2 are put into poetry in English by Vyaleta Saviankova.

¹⁰⁷ Hymn "Dorogie minuty nam Bog daroval" [The Lord Has Given Us Precious Moments], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 679.

¹⁰⁸ Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptizm i Baptisty*, pp. 209, 202.

¹⁰⁹ Measure of church discipline (cf. 2 Thess. 3:14). Church members under admonition are not allowed to take part in any kind of ministry, membership meetings, or participate in the Lord's Supper. A person can be under admonition for a period of up to six months. Then, depending on their behavior, a member of the church can be restored in their rights, or excommunicated.

¹¹⁰ The last stage of church discipline: a member of the church is deprived of all rights of membership (cf. Matt. 18:15-17). Questions of admonition or excommunication are the responsibility of the church council or membership meeting. Yaroslav Pyzh believes that "the practice of New Testament discipline and excommunication vividly proved the high standard applied to church members" ("The Confessional Community as the Ecclesiological Core of the Baptists in the Soviet Union, 1960-1990" [PhD diss., the School of Theology, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, 2012]). Nikolai Levindanto, one of the AUCECB senior pastors, noted the importance of timely excommunication, since "it is necessary for the correction and repentance of the excommunicated, in order to prevent the staining of the church and to avoid the temptation of others." (Nikolai Levindanto, "Blagochinie pomestnyh tserkvey ili tserkovnaya distsiplina" [Godliness of Local Churches or Church Discipline], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 3-4 (1955): 15.) He also stated that "excommunication could be applied only for cases of revealed and proved sin, apostasy or falling into heresy after all evangelical measures have been taken for the correction of the sinning person while notwithstanding he or she has stayed incorrigible" (Ibid.). Later another magazine author paid attention to the danger of the abuse of excommunications (A. Karev, "Zloupotrebleniya otlucheniymi" [Abuse of Excommunications], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 1 (1971): 66-69). Over the last years in some

the Book of Psalms, and practices in the early church as described in the Book of Acts, communicate that it is the duty of all church members to attend church services:

Each church member is called to attend church services and to be worthy to take part in Lord's Supper (Heb. 10:25; Ps. 16:3; Ps. 27:4; Ps. 122:1; 1 Cor. 11:26-28; Acts 2:42).¹¹¹

In particular each church member is obliged to take part in the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:27; Mark 14:23) and to be diligent in attending all the church services officiated by the congregation both on Sunday as well as on week days (Heb. 10:25; Acts 1:14; Acts 2:1; Acts 2:42; Acts 4:24; Ps. 27:4; Ps. 122:1; Ps. 84:1-2). Only in extreme necessity or in sickness may a church member be excused from participating in the Lord's Supper or attending public worship, and especially membership meetings (Ps. 116:18-19).¹¹²

It ought to be noted that admonitions and exhortations to attend public services are hardly needed in the case of the middle-aged and elderly people who attended worship during Soviet times¹¹³ and who have particular respect and reverence for church services as an inseparable part of their life. Past experiences cause them to value what they possess today because in the past public worship attendance was tied to overcoming various kinds of difficulties. One of these obstacles was the authorities banning children from involvement in or even attending public worship. It was against the law for a religious organization to “teach minors religion, get them to take part in their choirs, orchestras and crafts groups, as well as hold...special prayer meetings for children and teenagers.”¹¹⁴

Another difficulty was insufficient seating in the houses of prayer, especially in large cities such as Minsk or Brest.¹¹⁵ Some church members would arrive at a meeting an hour or two before the start in order to secure a seat. The inconvenient locations of the houses of prayer should also be mentioned. In such cities as Mogilev, Brest, and Vitebsk, the sites were located on the outskirts and in remote, hard-to-reach areas. The authorities tried their best to reduce the

churches, including Borovliany, the Minsk region and “Light of Gospel,” Minsk, if a person does not attend worship in this church and there is no clear picture of his or her spiritual well-being, there is an option of excluding the person's name from the list of church members. The question remains open in regard to the acceptance of such a person back into membership if he or she returns. (Minutes of the membership meetings, no. 04 [2 April 2014], no. 06 [14 February 2016] Church in Borovliany, Minsk region.) From 1997 to 2012 I was involved in “Light of Gospel” church ministry as a deacon and one of the pastors, and since 2012 have regularly visited it.

¹¹¹ *Verouchenie evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v Belarusi, prinyatoe na 43-m s'ezde evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov* (1985 g.) [Doctrine of Faith of Evangelical Christian Baptists in Belarus, adopted at the 43rd Congress of Evangelical Christian Baptists (1985), unpublished material, Section VII, The Church of Christ.

¹¹² *Isповедание very khristian-baptistov* [Confession of Faith of Christian Baptists], published by F.P. Pavlov (1906), Section X, On the Church of God. *Veчерia Gospodnia* (Lord's Supper) or simply *Veчерia* (Supper) (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25) and *hleboprelomlenie* (breaking bread) (Luke 24:35; Acts 2:42), or its short form *prelomlenie* (breaking), are the most commonly used terms in relation to the rite of remembrance of the death and passion of Christ. Another word for Communion, *prichastie* (1 Cor. 10:16-17)—which literally means “to become a part of”—is used too, but it is even more popular among the Orthodox Christians. In this work, I will mostly use “the Lord's Supper,” but these other terms and their meanings should be kept in mind.

¹¹³ Here we focus particularly on the period between 1945 and 1998.

¹¹⁴ G.R. Golst, *Religiya i zakon* [Religion and Law] (Moskva: “Yuridicheskaya literatura,” 1975), pp. 36-37.

Nevertheless in spite of bans the youth and children of many churches took active part in worship, primarily music ministry. In the 1970s and 1980s the author with his brothers and a sister attended worship services of the churches in Drogichyn and Ivanovo districts, Brest region. There we sang, played the button accordion, domra, recited poetry, and the elder brothers began preaching. In fact, the existence of such ban is a proof that the practice was prevalent in some churches at the time.

¹¹⁵ “House of prayer” was and is the common way for the Baptist believers to refer to the church building.

number of churches, which made the situation even harder. To quote the words of the Commissioner for Religious Affairs for Brest region, “I think it is essential to merge small neighboring church communities (within 10 km) into bigger ones in the nearest future. It will allow us to study them in a deeper way and introduce proper order there.”¹¹⁶ The complaint to the Commissioner of Religious Affairs in BSSR from the members of Baptist community in Belky, Glubokoe District, Vitebsk Region in 1960 is revealing in this regard: “The majority of our membership of 22 are elderly people, but we want to pray. It is impossible for us to get to any other community since the roads are muddy or covered in clay, and the horses are always busy and on weekends they rest.”¹¹⁷

Later on, the development of the public transportation system and the personal possession/acquisition of motorcycles and cars relieved the situation for Christians traveling for public worship. Nevertheless, it did not completely solve the problem. As an example, my parents were members of a Baptist church located in a distant area (Svyatopolka, Ivanovo District, Brest Region) because there was no church near our home in Lipniki, Drogichin District. In the 1970s–1980s our typical trip to a two-hour church meeting involved a walk or ride on bicycles for two kilometers, then a ride of fifteen kilometers on a bad forest road in a bus, and finally a walk of four more kilometers. Then, returning home, all was repeated in reverse order.¹¹⁸ Such circumstances played a significant role in forming the sense of the special value of a worship service and imprinting it onto a Russian-speaking Baptist mind.

2.2. Worship as a refuge

Besides the politically-conditioned limited opportunities associated with attending and participating in the service, the essential importance of worship services was promoted by an ideological gap between Christians and an antagonistically inclined socialist society. Christians were convinced that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one”¹¹⁹ and that corruption at the highest levels indicated the approaching end of this world and the coming of Christ:

When you look around

¹¹⁶ State Archive of Brest Region (SABR), Stock 1339, File 1, Case 1, p. 7. Kasataya, “Evangel'skiya khrystsiyane-baptysty ý BSSR u 1944 – pachatku 1950-kh gg.,” p. 144.

¹¹⁷ National Archive of the Republic of Belarus (NARB), Stock 952, File 3, Case 21, p. 280. In the letter to the Commissioner for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the Byelorussian SSR written on 30 June 1966, the ECB community in Brest noted that “in Voolka Podgorodskaya there is only one bus route. The bus is constantly crowded, so it is not possible to get on it, especially for the senior believers” (Ibid., Stock 952, File 3, Case 21, pp. 141–142).

¹¹⁸ The situation with public transport still has a negative effect in the villages and small towns, and transportation conditions may have a strong influence on the time and the attendance of services in churches. In such villages as Lesovnia, Volok, Starye Terushki in the Minsk region, the church pastor or their assistant goes around several villages before worship starts to gather and bring the elderly worshippers to the church and then takes them home again afterwards.

¹¹⁹ 1 John 5:19. Unless noted otherwise, Bible quotations in English are from NASB translation.

You cannot describe with your pen how many things are doomed for eternal damnation.
Evil is raging without end, son fights against the father
And the word of God becomes fulfilled.¹²⁰

Thus, these believers regarded themselves as a “little flock,”¹²¹ travelling on “the narrow way,”¹²² rejected by the world and chosen by the Lord.¹²³ A segment of this separation from the world related to the realm of marriage and family. Those church members who got married to non-believers ¹²⁴ (referred to as sinners, “outsiders,” ¹²⁵ and “Chaldeans” ¹²⁶) were excommunicated, for “what fellowship has light with darkness?”¹²⁷ Such a perception of the need for separation from the sinful world and “bad company” which “corrupts good morals”¹²⁸ led to the isolation of Baptist Christians, willingly or imposed, in culture and in everyday life.

Withdrawal from this world also implied a decisive rupture from Communist ideology and secular culture. In fact, Marxism–Leninism could be regarded as an opposing religion with its own “trinity” (Marx, Engels, Lenin), “gatherings” (demonstrations), “Scriptures” (books by Lenin), “saints” (heroes and martyrs of the revolution in 1917 and World War II like Pavlik Morozov, Nikolai Ostrovskiy, Zoja Kosmodem'yanskaya), and “rituals” (parades, graduation ceremonies, awarding of honors, passing-out parade for the Soviet army). “The cult of worship” of “the ever-living Lenin,” as he was typically referred to, and who was entombed in the central “temple” (mausoleum) of the country, was served by the “high priests” of the cult—the Communist Party officials.¹²⁹ Indeed, in 1923, the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) adopted a resolution on anti-religious propaganda in the country which particularly stressed the importance of “replacing religious rites with civil events, that is, religious holidays with civil and industrial holidays (such as harvest festival, sowing festival, etc.), sacraments with solemn civil acts, for example, civil funerals, mourning, weddings, naming and birth registration.”¹³⁰

¹²⁰ The poem “20-i vek!” [The 20th century!], *Stikhotvoreniya, declamatsii, istorii* [Poems, Recitations, Stories] (Lipniki, 1960s, Unpublished), second verse. Available in Russian through the author.

¹²¹ Luke 12:32.

¹²² Matt. 7:13-14.

¹²³ 1 Pet. 2:9.

¹²⁴ For marriages among Baptists see Ekaterina Mironova, “*Predstavleniya o brake i brachnyye praktiki yevangel'skikh veruyushchikh v Sovetskom Soyuze v 1940–1980-ye gg. Po materialam obshchin yevangel'skikh khristian-baptistov tsentral'no-chernozemnogo regiona.*”

¹²⁵ 1 Cor. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 3:7.

¹²⁶ 2 Kings 25:13; Jer. 39:8; 51:24. The terms “outsiders” and “Chaldeans” are used by Belarusian Baptists to denote people who do not belong to the evangelical church. The second term is usually used in colloquial speech.

¹²⁷ 2 Cor. 6:14.

¹²⁸ 1 Cor. 15:33.

¹²⁹ For a consideration of Marxism as a religious outlook and its relation to Christianity, see Parush R. Parushev, “Marxism and Christianity,” in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, ed. Martin Davie, Tim Grass, Steven R. Holmes and John McDowell, 2nd rev. ed. (Nottingham, England/Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2016): 552-554. According to Alexander Schmemmann, atheism and secularism have a peculiar longing for a “liturgical” expression (Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* [Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1963], p. 119).

¹³⁰ L.I. Yemelyakh, *Proiskhozhdenie Khristianskogo kul'ta* [Origins of the Christian Cult] (Leningrad:

It is important to note that Baptists did not officially preach seclusion as a lifestyle. Even in the days of severe persecution their preaching opposed escapism and references to an ascetic lifestyle. Separation from the world was not required; what was required was to keep oneself from evil while living in the world.¹³¹ However, such avoidance of evil and profanity required estrangement from participation in various forms of “worldly” activity. Thus, Soviet Baptists were unwilling to participate in parades which celebrate Victory Day or the Great October Socialist Revolution. As a rule, they did not attend theaters, concert halls, discos, or mass entertainment events, and held a negative attitude toward television, believing that these might harm their spiritual life.¹³²

Sociological research done in Belarus in the 1960s revealed that 68.7 % of Baptists read only religious books, primarily the Bible. Only 15.1% of them read fiction—mainly books published before the Revolution in Russia or abroad—and only a few read modern Soviet Belarusian and/or Russian fiction.¹³³ More than half of Baptists (53.5%) were reported to listen to radio broadcasts, although irregularly, and about 19.4% to occasionally watch television. An insignificant part, only 9.4%, of Baptists was reported to occasionally watch films. In the following years, the number of Evangelical Christians listening to radio broadcasts grew, but their attention was primarily captured by religious broadcasts transmitted in a short-wave range, especially by Trans World Radio and the “Voice of the Andes.”¹³⁴ Radio broadcast filled the deficiency of public worship participation and compensated for almost a complete lack of Christian books and frequently a low level of sermon preparation in churches.

Using these figures, atheist propagandists in the 1960s argued that believers lived in intellectual poverty, lacked public interest or a fulfilling hobby, and had low involvement in the life of a team in the workplace or the social and cultural life of the country. Yet for Baptists, worship services defined life priorities.¹³⁵ In their understanding, they had not deprived

Lenizdat, 1972), p. 187.

¹³¹ John 17:15-16.

¹³² Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptizm i Baptisty*, pp. 113, 129.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 129-130, 164-166. Considering the severe negative bias towards the Christians in the Soviet period, during which virtually all the material about believers was written to support Communist Party ideology, one should have a certain degree of skepticism towards the presented percentages, but the picture presented here does not jar with other known facts of the period.

¹³⁴ Personal experience of the author's family and other Baptists in Belarus in 1970s-1980s. Trans World Radio was originally called “Voice of Tangier,” as it broadcasted from the International zone of Tangier (in Morocco) from 1954 to 1959. Later on, the broadcast station moved to Monte Carlo and continues broadcasting all over the world to this day. In 1958 Nikolai and Rosa Leonovich began recording radio programs to broadcast in Russian with the goal of reaching the Soviet Union. One of the most popular and liked preachers was Yarl Nikolaevich Peisty. (Trans World Radio, official website, <https://www.twr.org.>, last accessed 16 May 2019.)

“The Voice of the Andes” (HCJB) was the first international HF radio in the world which started broadcasting from Quito, Ecuador in 1941. The first missionaries broadcasting in Russian were Konstantin and Elizaveta Levshenia, later followed by Alex Leonovich, Jakov and Ruf Shalenko, and other preachers. “The Voice of the Andes” broadcast covered an area of eleven time zones of the former Soviet Union. More information on its history can be found on <http://www.hcjb.ru/history.htm>., last accessed 3 February 2017.

¹³⁵ L.M. Ignatenko, *Osobennosti psikhologii baptistov*, Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni

themselves of pleasure. To the contrary, they believed they had access to the highest joy. Such an outlook is reflected in the following poem popular with young people around the time of *perestroika*, which demonstrates the apologetics of Christian life:

Christian life is so dull and eventless -
This is what many people will say.
They maintain that routine is so endless
That no dreams will come true anyway...
 We have left evil ways and devotions,
 Shall we now wipe their dust off our feet?
 Use your feet for God-honouring motions,
 Not for dancing or trifling pursuits.
Our joy is so pure and enduring,
It is pleasing and good for the soul.
I must say this with greater assurance -
Christian life is fulfilling in all!¹³⁶

Thus, during the Soviet era the worship service became the main place for self-actualization, fulfillment of spiritual and emotional needs, the center of Christian fellowship and a key factor in the transmission of spiritual values. In fact, it played a vital role in the survival and further development of Baptists as a denomination. Participation in worship, as well as Bible study, choir and orchestra rehearsals, and youth trips to other churches replaced secular cultural or entertainment events.¹³⁷ Even atheist researchers noted this characteristic:

The influence of sectarians among the retrograde part of the population and young people could be explained to a certain degree by the fact that they find various ways of satisfying a person's spiritual interest, presenting them as an alternative to our cultural work among the masses. At the same time an aspiration for full satisfaction of spiritual needs of Christians often goes far beyond the limits of religious interests. In order to attract attention of the youth the sectarians have lately started to arrange their prayer services in a solemn way in an attempt to meet aesthetic and cultural Christian needs. The majority of the sects use theatrical techniques and forms, developing their own amateur theatricals, making performances on the days of religious celebrations intended for attraction of both Christians and non-Christians. With the help of music, skillfully and thoroughly prepared theatrical skits accompanied by prayer, they attempt to bring up the feeling of reverent awe and a "foretaste of heavenly joy," etc.¹³⁸

Development of worship forms, freedom of creativity, depth of fellowship, and preaching of high and pure ideals were elevating the spirits of Evangelical Christians. Any lack of worldly entertainment was compensated by an exciting and plentiful church life. With full assurance,

kandidata filosofskikh nauk [Peculiarities of Baptist Psychology, Abstract of Dissertation for the Degree of Candidate of Philosophical Sciences] (Minsk: Akademiya nauk, 1968), p. 15.

¹³⁶ The poem "Khristianskaya zhizn" [The Christian Life], *Stikhotvoreniya, deklamatsii, istorii*, first, sixth and sixteenth verses.

¹³⁷ Some public events related to family life, such as weddings, funerals, births, birthdays worked in the same way. For example, weddings were turned into worship services lasting for hours or even two days with songs and sermons, which might not be strictly related to the topic.

¹³⁸ F.I. Garkavenko, *Khristianskoe sektantstvo v SSSR*, Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata filosofskikh nauk [Christian Sectarianism in the USSR, Abstract of Dissertation for the Degree of Candidate of Philosophical Sciences] (Moskva: Institut narodnogo khozyaistva im. G.V. Plekhanova, 1964), p. 14. Baptists would agree with the author that the aesthetic element had no value in itself, but served as a means to evoke faith and strengthen it.

young Christians sang:

Offering all days to Jesus,
Vigour and strength, we will give it to Christ,
We shall approach Him and humbly
Bring our dear sacrifice!
Serving and following Jesus - Nothing compares to this life (this joyful life),
All of your heart and your reason,
Giving Him all of your love (Give him all).¹³⁹

Secular researcher Lev Mitrokhin assessed the situation in the following way:

As a result sincere Christians (and we can classify most Baptists among them) found themselves to be outcasts in their society, and they were driven to special spiritual “zones.” Therefore, they have gone from this world never to return, leaving the cultural achievements, the actual wealth accumulated for centuries by the human thought.¹⁴⁰

At the same time, many Baptists would have been favorably disposed to the literary richness of Russian culture, especially to literature by Lomonosov, Derzhavin, Lermontov, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and other authors who wrote on some biblical themes.¹⁴¹ However, the attitude toward secular culture as a means of recreation and enjoyment was negative.

In the recent years, the understanding that one ought to treat secular culture with reticence has become weaker; the world does not seem as hostile as it was during the times of persecution. Many young Baptists study at secular Universities. Even if unofficially, different kinds of pleasures are enjoyed. Some new believers, as along with a significant proportion of young people as a whole, go to theaters and cinemas, philharmonic societies, concert halls and sports events. The fact that in the twenty-first century some members of “Light of Gospel,” “Light of Truth,” and “Bethlehem” churches in Minsk work or have worked in the Theater of Musical Comedy, or Opera and Ballet, or the Philharmonic, is puzzling to some Christians of the older generation. In the age of computers and other technologies, the issue of having or not having a television at home no longer has importance as a “Baptist distinctive.” Nevertheless, for the majority of Baptists, public worship still remains the main source of meeting their spiritual needs, especially in small towns and villages where people have limited opportunities for their free time and negative attitudes toward secular culture remain dominant.

2.3. A unique place of fellowship

The cultural gap was not the only factor giving value and prominence to public worship. The isolation of Baptist Christians from the rest of the society on an everyday level also

¹³⁹ “Luchshie dni nashei zhizni” [The Best Days of Our Life], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 725, first stanza.

¹⁴⁰ Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost'*, pp. 243-244.

¹⁴¹ E.g., Dimitru Sevastian assesses the influence of the literary work of Fyodor Dostoevsky on the Moldovan Baptists in his “‘Christ’s Way:’ Biography as Theology in the Literature of F. M. Dostoevsky” (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2012).

contributed to that gap. Only in the house of worship did Christians realize their need of fellowship on vertical and horizontal levels, which for them represented a time of sacred fellowship. According to the deepest conviction of the “ones gathered in His name,”¹⁴² worship within a fellowship was the most glorious and comforting moment in a believer’s life. Expressing their joy, they sang:

No greater consolation,
No fuller joy to gain.
The Lord of all creation
Has fellowship with people.
It is sweet and wonderful to be in eternal fellowship with Him,
It is sweet and wonderful to be in fellowship with Him.¹⁴³

Such fellowship with God made it possible for those who shared common faith in the Lord to feel themselves a part of a community of like-minded people. On the one hand, Baptists were not able to have much community experience at school or at work, as Communist policies led to animosity against Baptists. On the other hand, the conflict of worldviews in its practical implication did not allow for common interests or spending much time with “sinners” outside of an educational establishment or a factory, especially because they may drink alcoholic beverages, smoke, dance, curse, play cards, and engage in other activities unacceptable from the Baptist point of view.¹⁴⁴ Children raised in Baptist homes usually would not join “the Young Pioneers” and “the Communist Youth League.”¹⁴⁵ Christians were suspicious of different social movements and organizations. In turn, they were discriminated against when applying for a job,¹⁴⁶ and a student could be expelled from a university or technical school if the authorities discovered that they belonged to a “sect.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Matt. 18:20.

¹⁴³ “Net bol'she uteshen'ya, net radosti polnei” [No Greater Consolation, No Fuller Joy to Gain], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 171, first stanza and refrain.

¹⁴⁴ See autobiographies and memoirs about the life of Evangelicals in the USSR: I. Bondarenko, *Tri prigovora* [Three Verdicts] (Odessa: “Khristianskoe prosveshchenie,” 2006); Vladimir Vil'chinskiy, *Nedarom proliyye slezy* [Tears Shed not in Vain] (Brest, 2011); Victor Ryaguzov, *Zhizn' vopreki* [Life in Spite of] (Samara: “Izdatel'skiy dom “Dobrusich,” 2011). Victor was expelled from Kuibyshev Medical Institute in 1973 and blacklisted because of his faith. His letter of protest addressed to Leonid Brezhnev remained unanswered. For many years he was employed as an electrician whilst also serving as a pastor of a Baptist church.

¹⁴⁵ On December 21, 1966, Nina Volos, a six-grade student of Pruzhany Secondary School No. 1 came home in tears. She had been expelled from school for not wearing a Pioneer’s tie and for supposedly attending the funeral of an elderly Christian neighbor. The school director’s reaction towards the parents’ complaint was, “She got what she deserved.” (National Historical Archive of Belarus (NHAB), Stock 136, File 1, Case 4, p. 118.)

¹⁴⁶ To give a personal example, in 1962 my mother was fired from a school in which she had been teaching dressmaking, on the grounds of her becoming a member of a Baptist church.

¹⁴⁷ Alexander Firisiuk, a former President of the Baptist Union in Belarus, shared his story. In 1955 he applied to the Belarusian Forestry Engineering Institute. In 1958 the KGB learnt that Firisiuk was attending ECB worship in Minsk. He was summoned to the KGB office and was invited to provide information about the situation in the church. Firisiuk declined the offer and as a result was expelled from the Institute for his “religious beliefs.” With great difficulty he managed to complete his training by correspondence. (Personal interview with author, Minsk, 22 April 2011 [Personal notes (2008-2018), p. 59].) In 1959, the *Chyrvonaya zmena* newspaper no. 206 (CC KCUY of Belarus, October 20), p. 3 published an article by A. Rydz'koyski entitled “Know Your Comrade in the Lecture

Family ties were not able to meet the need in fellowship if the relatives did not belong to the church. “Holy fellowship,” fellowship “in spirit,” was only possible with those sharing common faith, which happened, primarily, in public worship and to an equal degree before and after the service. One could often hear this quote from a psalm at the beginning of, or during, a worship service: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!”¹⁴⁸ At the end of an encouraging gathering the leader might recall the experience of Jesus’ disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, quoting Peter’s words, “Lord, it is good for us to be here.”¹⁴⁹

Considering the substantial role of worship from a cultural, psychological or social viewpoint, its spiritual value surely cannot be underestimated. Worship was and still remains a center for the religious activity of Baptists, a source of spiritual life, a place of repentance and confession of sins, the means of comfort and strengthening hope for the Second Coming, the main place of meeting with the Lord and keeping the faith to transmit it to future generations, and a special time of prayer and holy fellowship. Moreover, attending church worship was and remains an essential issue in the formation of Baptist identity and preserving it in a society in which Baptists view themselves as “sojourners” and “tenants.”¹⁵⁰

Certainly, it is impossible to deny the fact that drastic change in a political, ideological and social context since the beginning of *perestroika* and enlargement of the scope of church activities has resulted in diminishing the formerly exclusive role of public worship in Christian life. Moreover, this process is likely to continue. The current structure of Baptist worship life continues to exclude children from participation in public worship. In most churches, Sunday school for children and teenagers is organized during worship and a children’s choir may rehearse at the same time.¹⁵¹ Sometimes children spend a limited time in worship and then go to Sunday school, which is convenient for parents because they do not have to arrive early or wait for their children after the service.¹⁵² It is not surprising that children prefer well-prepared

Room.” The article denounced Firisiuk’s beliefs and his belonging to the church. See also Alexander Firisiuk, *Radost' seyaniya so slezami* [The Joy of Sowing with Tears] (Minsk: Union of Evangelical Christians of Baptists in the Republic of Belarus, 2017), pp. 25-34.

¹⁴⁸ Psalm 133:1.

¹⁴⁹ Matt. 17:4.

¹⁵⁰ 1 Chron. 29:15. A good example may be public worship in the church in Man'kovichi, Stolin district, Brest region. In the 1970s-1980s, meetings on the weekdays began at ten o'clock in the evening and sometimes later. The preaching and singing were well prepared, but after a hard-working day it was difficult to talk about the practical value of the meeting because some of those present could hardly stay awake. But the important fact was presence and participation in the meeting. Believers came there to show which side they were on. (The testimony of a church pastor Vladimir Vandich, Personal interview with author, Man'kovichi, Brest region, 18 May 2008 [Personal notes, p. 2b].)

¹⁵¹ Sunday Schools in Baptist churches are just for children and teenagers. Adults and youth are usually invited to come to Bible studies on weekday nights.

¹⁵² There are some exceptions. Sunday school has classes after morning worship in “Ark” church in Volkovysk. In this way the children are present with their parents in worship. Only small children (up to 3 years old) can stay in the children’s room during worship. (Personal visits of the author to the church service, 15 March 2015)

Sunday school classes which are often taught in the form of games, or accompanied by games, to “boring and incomprehensible” preaching. The concern is that eventually they become isolated from the special atmosphere of the church and the worship service is not their center of attraction.¹⁵³

Diversification of church activities also leads to a shift in focus. Young people have a wide variety of church activities besides public worship: youth conferences and Bible study in small groups, Christian clubs and hobby groups, and classes in Bible schools and summer camps. Middle-aged and elderly people also now have more opportunities to meet their spiritual needs through internet and satellite television, whereby access to quality spiritual literature and a wealth of good sermons in electronic, video and audio formats reduces the importance of traditional preaching in a house of prayer. Of course, this is not at all unique to the Belarusian Baptist context. As noted by the authors of *Worship in the Network*, “The Sunday service no longer has a monopoly, but stands along 'spectacle worship' at mass events, rituals on the World Wide Web, and private and individual rituals.”¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless worship services remain the most important indicator of spirituality and the means of its expression in Belarusian Baptist life. Demonstrating their belonging to Christ, Baptists in traditional churches get together bringing along their Bibles and hymnals (which are being gradually replaced by smartphones) to become stronger in their faith and gain power to live in this difficult world. Fellowship with God and fellow believers in public worship is seen to provide such strength and power.

Summing up the role of worship from an historical perspective we should note its exceptional value and importance in understanding the identity of believers and their spiritual formation. In difficult times, it sustained the faith of the Baptists and served as a source of encouragement and comfort. An analysis of songs and official documents, as well as personal testimonies and the experience of believers in the Soviet era show that the value of worship is increasing in times of persecution and limited opportunities.

Observation, involvement in church life, as well as external evidence confirm that in isolation, caused by the hostile attitude of the communist regime towards believers, worship has acquired a special status. The political context contributed to the conscious isolation of believers and their separation from the "sinful world", as well as limited participation in the life of the society. Worship, preparation for it, and Bible study were the main occasions for putting skills and gifts into practice, and became a center of communication, all of which replaced

[Personal notes, p. 2b].)

¹⁵³ Of course, this challenge is not unique to Russian-speaking Baptists, but for many churches and denominations. Some authors explore this challenge, such as Michelle A. Clifton-Soderstrom and David D. Bjorlin, *Incorporating Children in Worship: Mark of the Kingdom* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014).

¹⁵⁴ Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, p. 14.

involvement in secular activities.

The isolation and marginalization of believers in society contributed to the growth of ties within church, which only intensified as result of family bonds and marriages exclusively between church members. Worship became a safe place for like-minded people who were strangers in their own country. At the same time, the study shows that the value of worship decreases with the cessation of persecution, a change in attitude towards believers in society and the emergence of new opportunities for ministry outside houses of prayer, although worship attendance and participation in it remains the main indicator of spiritual life. Worship continues to play the role of a connecting center and a place of fellowship for evangelical believers. Examining the context of worship formation is undertaken in the next chapter, as well as singling out sources of influence that have determined the character of worship. This is designed to facilitate a better understanding of the indigenous character of worship and its place in the spiritual life of Belarusian Baptists.

CHAPTER 3. HISTORICAL ROOTS

3.1. The origin of evangelical churches in Belarus

3.1.1. The second part of the nineteenth century – early twentieth century

Evangelical Christianity reached Belarus from several geographical sources. The authors of a seminal book on the history of ECB churches in the former Soviet Union identify four primary sources of influence: Southern Ukraine, Siberia, Germany and Austria, and the United States.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, facts reveal that the geography is even wider. In this chapter I conduct a brief review of the key historical moments in order to trace the sources of influence. This review and analysis of the emergence of the evangelical movement in Belarus demonstrates that whilst it indeed came from several sources, it was also marked by spontaneity. Although in some areas purposeful missionary activities were carried out, the spread of the evangelical movement in general or, as some historians term it, a “revival,”¹⁵⁶ was not a planned sequence of events, but was conditioned by specific circumstances of life as well as political and economic factors.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, poor peasants began to move from Belarus to southern Ukraine in search of employment. After being introduced to the Gospel, some of them were converted and began to preach to their neighbors and relatives after returning home,

¹⁵⁵ *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR* (Moskva: Izdaniye Vsesoyuznogo soveta evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov, 1989), pp. 380-391. See also V.Y. Kanatush, “Istoriya evangel'skogo dvizheniya v Belarusi” [The History of Evangelical Movement in Belarus], *Krynitsa Zhyttsya* [Source of Life], no. 2 (1998): 24-32. Even now there is no thorough published research on history of Baptists in Belarus. There are only a limited number of chapters in books that deal with the history of the Baptist movement in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union as well as some articles, notes and memoirs in magazines and encyclopedias. Beside the above-mentioned sources, we should note Lensu and Prokshina, eds., *Baptizm i Baptisty*; and an article by Vladimir Kanatush, “Istoriya evangel'skogo dvizheniya v Belarusi” [The History of Evangelical Movement in Belarus], *Krynitsa Zhyttsya*, no. 4 (1998): 16-20. Recently Minsk Theological Seminary has produced three helpful volumes in Belarusian: A.I. Bokun, ed., *Yevanhielskaya tsarkva Bielarusi: gistoryya i suchasnasc' (da 600-hoddzia Yevanhielskai Tsarkvy ŭ Bielarusi): zbornik materyjalaŭ Mizhnarodnaj navukova-praktychnaj kanfierencyi (Minsk, 7 sniezhnia 2013 h.)* [Evangelical Church of Belarus: History and the Present (the 600th Anniversary of the Evangelical Church in Belarus): The Collection of Materials of the International Scientific-Practical Conference (Minsk, 7 December 2013)] (Minsk: Pazityu-tsent, 2014); A.I. Bokun, ed., *Yevanhielskaya tsarkva Bielarusi: gistoryya i suchasnasc'. Vypusk II: (da 500-hoddzia Mikalaja Radzivila Chornaha): zbornik materyjalaŭ II Mizhnarodnaj navukova-praktychnaj kanfierentsyi (Minsk, 5 sniezhnia 2015 h.)* [Evangelical Church of Belarus: History and the Present. Issue II: (for the 500th anniversary of Nikolai Radziwill the Black): a collection of materials and the international scientific-practical conference (Minsk, 5 December 2015)] (Minsk: Pazityu-tsent, 2016); and A.I. Bokun, ed., *Yevanhielskaya tsarkva Bielarusi: gistoryya i suchasnasc'. Vypusk III: (da 500-hoddzia Refarmatsyi i 500-hoddzia belaruskay Biblii): zbornik materyjalaŭ III Mizhnarodnaj navukova-praktychnaj kanfierentsyi (Minsk, 9 sniezhnia 2017 h.)* [Evangelical Church of Belarus: History and the Present. Issue III: (for the 500th anniversary of Reformation and the 500th anniversary of Belarusian Bible): a collection of materials and the international scientific-practical conference (Minsk, 9 December 2017)] (Minsk: Pazityu-tsent, 2018). In 2019 another helpful book written by a local researcher was published: U. I. Navitski, et. al, *Jevanhielskija chryscijanie u Bielarusi: piať stahoddziau historyi (1517-2017 hh.)* [Evangelical Christians in Belarus: Five Centuries of History (1517-2017)], (Minsk: Tealahičny instytut HVE, 2019).

¹⁵⁶ Johannes Dyck, “Revival and Baptist Beginning in Russia,” *Baptistic Theologies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 14-22.

establishing the first communities in southeastern Belarus.¹⁵⁷ The Baptist church in the village of Ut', Gomel district, Mogilev province, is believed to have started in the late 1870s, which suggests that it was the first evangelical church on the territory of present-day Belarus.¹⁵⁸ *Mogilevskiiye yeparkhial'nyye vedomosti* newspaper reported that there were one hundred and seventeen Baptists in the village Ut' in 1906.¹⁵⁹

One of a number of peasants who had sought employment in southern Ukraine was Dmitriy Pavlovich Sementsov. There he had encountered Baptists and joined them in Odessa. In 1877, he returned to his village of Usokhi, Gomel district¹⁶⁰ where he gathered a group of Evangelicals and established a church in 1879.¹⁶¹ In 1882, this group had twenty-nine members and by 1885 it had grown to ninety-five members.¹⁶² The influence of a southern Ukrainian source was also detected in other villages of Gomel district, including Dubovy Log, Stary Krupets as well as Cherkov and Rogachev districts of Mogilev province, where Shtundists were reported to be present at least by 1884-1885.¹⁶³ In 1903-1905 there were at least two Baptist

¹⁵⁷ V. Yanouskaya, *Hrystsiyanskaya tsarkva u Belarusi 1863 - 1914 gg.* [Christian Church in Belarus in 1863-1914] (Minsk: Belaruskii dziazhauny universitet, 2002), p. 69. *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, p. 381.

¹⁵⁸ Kanatush, "Istoriya evangel'skogo dvizheniya v Belarusi," p. 29. Kanatush notes that Akulina Fyodorovna Kopenkova, a local believer born in 1890, suggested that the Good News was brought to Ut' at the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century (Ibid). However, it is not possible to verify this statement.

¹⁵⁹ "Polozheniye sektantstva v predelakh Mogilevskoy yeparkhii i mery dlya bor'by s nim" [Position of sectarianism within the Mogilev diocese and measures to fight it], Iz raporta Yeparkhial'nogo missionera na imya Yego Preosviashchenstva [From the report of the Diocesan missionary to His Eminence], *Mogilevskiiye yeparkhial'nyye vedomosti* [Mogilev Diocesan Gazette], no. 8 (1906), p. 296. According to this report (p. 296) there were one hundred and seventy-two Baptists in the village of Ivaki, seventy in Krasnaya Buda and Nikolayevka, forty-nine in Kozhanovka, and nine in Starye Yurkovichi.

¹⁶⁰ Villages Ut' and Usokhi now are in Dobrush district, Gomel region.

¹⁶¹ Central State Historical Archives of the USSR (CSHA), Stock 1284, File 220, Case 12, p. 40. Report of the Mogilev Governor to the Minister of Internal Affairs, in Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptizm i Baptisty*, p. 18.

¹⁶² CSHA, Stock 1284, File 220, Case 7, p. 12.

¹⁶³ Rozhdestvensky, *Yuzhnorussky Shtundism*, p. 57.

Originally the Shtundist movement spread in Russia in the nineteenth century among the German colonists. The term "Shtundism" (from German word Stunde, meaning "an hour," devoted to Bible reading and interpretation) in relation to Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians is hard to define. The same can be said of the essence of Shtundists confessions, "since Shtundism does not represent any definite theological system or as it is revealed in masses of its followers" (S. Mel'gunov, *Tserkov' i gosudarstvo v Rossii* [Church and State in Russia] (Moskva, Zadruga, 1907), pp. 65-66). Sometimes it was simply associated with the Baptist movement (V.G. Pavlov, "Pravda o baptistakh. Ocherk istorii, tserkovnogo ustroystva i printsipov baptistskikh obshchin" [The Truth about Baptists. Essay on history, church organization and principles of Baptist communities], *Al'manakh po istorii russkogo baptizma* (Sanct-Peterburg: "Bibliya dlya vsekh," 1997): 233). Shtundism could be presented as a transitional stage from Orthodoxy to Baptism. Orthodox peasants, who formed relationships with the German colonists, originally got together for Bible study, and people began to call them Shtundists. Later many Shtundists were baptized as communities and converted into Baptists. Nevertheless they continued to be called Shtundists or Shtundo-Baptists, which afforded ground for persecution, especially after the recognition of Shtundism as an extremely destructive sect in 1894 in Russia, and all their worship was banned. (Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundobaptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae*, p. 29.) Russian minister Balikhin wrote in his report: "The mere title 'shtundists' with all the ascribed characteristics was launched by priests and [Orthodox] missionaries, in order to persecute these people as political propagandists rather than sectarians." (F.P. Balikhin, "Moya poezdka zagranitsu" [My Trip Abroad], *Baptist*, no. 1 (1907): 13-20, p. 14.) The authorities believed that Shtundists used Baptists as a cover, as Baptists were allowed to worship (the German settlers fell within the ambit of the edict on Baptist faith). That is why it is not always clear in the documents of those days whether "Shtundists" really refers to Shtundists or the Baptists. The term "Shtunda" was so much tied to the Baptists that it was sometimes used even in Belarus, far away from the

churches in this territory.¹⁶⁴ According to the reports submitted by the Orthodox priests of the time, there were about 500 Baptists (including children) in Mogilev province in the beginning of 1906.¹⁶⁵

Northern Belarus experienced other influences, namely from the Baltic region and the neighboring Russian province of Pskov.¹⁶⁶ Official correspondence gives some idea of what was happening in Vitebsk province. The report of the Governor in response to the request of the Ministry of Internal Affairs clearly shows that attempts were made to spread evangelical faith at the end of the nineteenth century:

At the end of 1895, in the Lucinski district of the province entrusted to me, a case of emergence of the Shtundist sect was detected, which was brought here from the Ostrovsky district, Pskov province. We were able to deal with the emerging sect in a timely manner by taking appropriate steps. . . So far no new cases of the emergence of Shtundism have been reported in the province entrusted to me.¹⁶⁷

Later evidence, from reports of district police officers in 1911-1912, however, shows that the authorities were unable to suppress the movement.

I report to Your Excellency that in Dvinsk there is a sect of Baptists who broke away from the Evangelical Lutheran confession. It consists of 20 people and they do not have a house of prayer. They invite Jan Kristopov Janson, a Baptist preacher from Jakobstadt [now Jēkabpils, Latvia], to help perform their religious rituals in the place where they get together.¹⁶⁸

Other officers report a Baptist family in Drissa district, who originally came from the Baltic countries¹⁶⁹ and about Baptists in the Dvina uyezd (Letts and Baltic Germans, as a rule). Almost all of them have a Lutheran background.¹⁷⁰ Mainly because of persecution, the first Evangelicals in northern Belarus had little impact on the development of the evangelical movement in the country as a whole, especially in comparison with their activities in the central and western part where the Baptist movement later started when the pressure of the authorities was not so strong.

In Minsk, church planting had begun in 1902. According to a report by the chief of the Minsk police, Gerasim Andryukhov and his wife arrived there from Kharkov province that year. This man belonged to a congregation of Russian Christian Baptists in the village of Obody, Kharkov province, and was a street vendor selling Bible Society books. On August 12, 1902, he obtained Permit No. 54 in Minsk to “sell books and pictures.”¹⁷¹ This work yielded such fruit

place of Shtundist origins, even until the second half of the twentieth century.

¹⁶⁴ NARB, Stock 952, File 2, Case 5, p. 254.

¹⁶⁵ “Polozheniye sektantstva v predelakh Mogilevskoy yeparkhii i mery dlya bor'by s nim,” p. 295.

¹⁶⁶ Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptizm i Baptisty*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁷ NHAB, Stock 1430, File 1, Case 43941, p. 2.

¹⁶⁸ Report of the Chief of Dvinsk Police, 1911. NHAB, Stock 1430, File 1, Case 48020, p. 15.

¹⁶⁹ Report of the Drissa district Police Officer (January 1912). NHBA, Stock 1430, File 1, Case 48020, p. 17.

¹⁷⁰ Report of the Dvinsk district Police Officer. NHAB, Stock 1430, File 1, Case 48020, p. 9.

¹⁷¹ NHAB, Stock 295, File 1, Case 8462, pp. 61-64.

that it aroused the concern of the authorities, as reflected in a report of the Head of Minsk Police to the Governor of Minsk province in January, 1914:

In recent years, a sect called Shtundists is believed to have appeared in Minsk and they have already seduced several Orthodox people and caused them to follow their doctrine. . . Supposedly the sect was organized by German workers, who are also masterminds of their activities. The inspection revealed that there is no such sect as Shtundists . . . but there is another sect, Baptists, which is also currently illegal. . . The people present had the following books: a) a Bible b) Brief index number 105, c) a New Testament, d) *Gusli*, a collection of religious songs edited by I.S. Prokhanov, e) a Christian calendar, f) *Gusli*, Third Edition. . . The sect was organized by Georgiy Yakovlevich Slesarenko, Ivan Fyodorovich Byelan and Artem Artemiev Khodasevich. . . The Andryukhovy were also actively involved and stayed in touch with the church in Obod, Yastrebenka parish, Sumy district, Kharkiv province. Moreover, Andryukhov, who is a commissioner for the sale of books published by the Evangelical Society, provides local followers of the sectarian doctrine with these books. According to Reverend Kvachevski, Andryukhov is the founder of the sect. . . Currently, there are 21 people in this Baptist sect.¹⁷²

There were also influences from northwestern Ukraine. The creation of ECB congregations in Volynia at the end of the nineteenth century, where missionaries from St. Petersburg and southern Ukraine were active, established a foundation for dynamic missionary activity in Polesie, the southern part of Belarus, and in the south-west.¹⁷³ It is likely that the first evangelical church in this area was founded in Pruzhany in 1906.¹⁷⁴ According to the same source, in 1910, there were eight Baptist congregations, the largest of which were Shtundo-Baptist congregations in Volynia and the Pinsk district.¹⁷⁵

3.1.2. Developments after World War I

The planting of churches increased considerably during and after World War I (WW1). Returning refugees and military captives, and then returning émigrés from America contributed to this ministry. In 1916, Nikita Ephimovich Shchelkun served in the army in Kiev where he met Evangelical Christians¹⁷⁶ from St. Petersburg who told him about Christ and gave him a Bible. When he returned to his home village of Proshchitsy (Slutsk district, Minsk province), he planted a church there. Other people in town were converted and services started in Slutsk. A house of prayer was opened in 1927 in Slutsk and, by the late 1920s, this congregation was the largest in Belarus. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, more than two hundred people were baptized each year in Slutsk. This church also helped to plant churches in Popovtsy, Tsalevichy, Starobin,

¹⁷² Ibid., pp. 61-63.

¹⁷³ T.V. Lisovskaya, "Novye protestantskie denominatsii na zapadnobelorusskikh zemliakh v kontse XIX – 20 gg. XX veka: Faktory i puti poyavleniya" [New Protestant denominations in West Belarusian territory between the late nineteenth century and the 1920s: Factors and ways of emergence], *Ves'nik Brestskaga universiteta* [Brest university messenger], no. 2 (30), (2007): 42.

¹⁷⁴ SABR, Stock 1, File 2, Case 1065, p. 13. It is likely that the church in Pruzhany had been founded earlier and in 1905-1906 it became legal due to the liberalization of the law in 1905.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ See footnote 6.

Skovshin and other nearby villages.¹⁷⁷

During WWI, some citizens in the western regions of Belarus found themselves in Siberia together with other refugees fleeing the war zones, and became Baptists in local Baptist congregations. When Anthon Grigorievich Kirtsun, who was baptized in 1917 in a church in Omsk, Siberia, returned home in 1923, he planted a church in Zelva, Grodno region. Later, churches were planted also in Volkovysk, where the first baptism took place in 1925, Lida and other settlements.¹⁷⁸ Kirtsun's followers were called "kirtsuns."¹⁷⁹

Some Belarusian soldiers during WWI were taken as prisoners to Germany and Austria where they met Evangelicals, became believers, and later began to spread their faith at home.¹⁸⁰ One of these was Luka Mikhailovich Gladky, who came to faith in 1914 in Austria. When he returned home, he was thought to be deranged because he read the New Testament which he had brought with him, abstained from alcohol and tobacco, and was bold enough to remove all icons from the walls. Eventually his mother and sisters joined his faith, and a home church was founded in Otradnoye, a village near Soligorsk, Minsk province. Then he founded the church in the village of Lesovnia.¹⁸¹

Nikita Vandich was also converted when ministers of German Baptist churches visited the prisoners of war. He attended classes at the Bible school in Germany and after returning home he founded over ten churches in the Stolin area, Brest region. Vandich helped to plant about thirty churches between the 1920s and 1939.¹⁸² German-speaking Christians were therefore indirectly involved in planting many churches in Belarus.

Another connection may be traced to the United States where some Belarusians went in search of employment. They were converted there and upon their return to the homeland started to share their faith. Anton Kazimirovich Senkevich preached in Nikolaevshchina, Minsk region, Iosif Pukhovskiy, who had received theological training in the USA, in Pruzhany,¹⁸³ and Afanasiy Gurin in Selishche, Pinsk district, Brest region. When Gurin was asked about his conversion, he replied: "While I was staying in America, I went to a sectarian school, where I

¹⁷⁷ Sergei Karchemenko and Sergei Rek, elders of the church in Slutsk. Personal letter to the author, January 5, 2009.

¹⁷⁸ Kanatush, "Istoriya evangel'skogo dvizheniya v Belarusi," p. 28; Leonid Kovalenko, *Oblako svidetelei Khristovyykh* [A cloud of witnesses of Christ] (Kiev: Centr Khristianskogo Sotrudnichestva, 1997), pp 155-156.

¹⁷⁹ V.V. Grygor'eva, V.M. Zavalniuk, U.I. Navitski, A.M. Filatava, *Kanfesii na Belarusi (kanets XVIII - XX st.)* [Confessions in Belarus (the end of XVIII - XX centuries)] (Minsk: VP "Ekaperspektyva," 1998), p. 212.

¹⁸⁰ V.F. Martsinkovskiy, *Zapiski veruyushchego* [A Believer's Notes] (Novosibirsk: "Posokh," 2006), p. 195.

¹⁸¹ A.L. Gladky and A.I. Firisiuk, "80 let razluk i vstrech" [80 years of Partings and Meetings], *Krynitsa Zhyttsya*, no. 2 (2007), pp. 18-21.

¹⁸² Information about Nikita Vandich's ministry was received in May 18, 2008, from his namesake Vladimir Vandich, the pastor of the church in Man'kovichi, Stolin district which had been planted by Nikita Vandich, and from other members of that church. (Personal notes, p. 59b.)

¹⁸³ Georgy Yevtukhovich, *Zhit' – znachit verit'. Iz istorii evangelicheskoi tserkvi v Belarusi* [To Live Means to Believe. From the History of an Evangelical Church in Belarus] (Minsk: A.N. Varaksin, 2006), p. 11.

learned to read and write and also learned the sectarian doctrine, which was the reason for my joining the sect.”¹⁸⁴

Tatsiana Lisovskaya, who explored the evangelical movement in Western Belarus in 1920-1930, writes:

Although there were few Protestants (0.9%) among the émigrés who came back to Western Belarus in 1921-1923, their return was one of the most important factors contributing to the development of Protestantism in 1920-30 because the return of Protestants had the spreading their teaching as its goal. . . . Based on the list of elders in the churches of Evangelical Christians and Baptists compiled by the Polesie Voivodship Office, 16 pastors out of 42 were re-émigrés from the United States and Russia who returned from emigration in 1921-1923.¹⁸⁵

Konstantin Yaroshevich and Ivan Bukovich¹⁸⁶ along with Georgiy Satsevich¹⁸⁷ started a Christian missionary center in Kobryn aiming at “concentration of missionary activity on the eastern outlying districts of Poland” in 1924.¹⁸⁸ In 1926 they registered the Union of Churches of Christ in Poland.¹⁸⁹ Kobryn became the center of activity of the Churches of Christ, uniting about seventy communities.¹⁹⁰

The evangelical movement also continued spreading from the territories of modern Poland. For example, Luka Dzekuts-Maley moved to Brest in 1921¹⁹¹ after he had been converted in Bialystok, where he met some Evangelicals, and baptized in 1912 by German

¹⁸⁴ The record of missionary trips of a Diocesan missionary to the Pinsk and Mozyr uyezds (NHAB, Stock 136, File 1, Case 38344, p. 1). The terms “sectarian” and “sect,” should be likely attributed to an Orthodox missionary who recorded a conversation with Afanasiy Gurin. Evangelical Christians did not use such terms.

¹⁸⁵ Lisovskaya, “Novye protestantskie denominatsii na zapadnobelorusskikh zemliakh v kontse XIX – 20 gg. XX veka,” p. 45. Based on the materials of the SABR, Stock 1, File 2, Case 2345, pp. 1-11. First of all, the author means Baptists, Evangelical Christians and Churches of Christ. There is one interesting note made by James H. Franklin about some graduates and their mission: “The last batch of Russian Baptists arrested at Minsk recently were graduates of the Baptist Institute of Philadelphia, where they began their training in 1920. At the conclusion of their studies they applied to the Soviet Legation in London for visas, but permission to re-enter Russia was refused. Eventually they succeeded in reaching Poland and crossing the frontier illegally.” (James H. Franklin, “Troubles Created for Baptists in Russia by American-Trained Baptists,” 1. Reports on foreign mission fields, 1919-1932. American Baptist Historical Society, Atlanta. BIM, 65-13.) For information like this also see W.O. Lewis, “Report on Baptists in Poland,” p. 7. ABHS, 65-1.

¹⁸⁶ Konstantin Yaroshevich was born in Belostok province. He went to the United States in 1910 and was converted in New York in 1912. In 1916 Yaroshevich graduated from Johnson's College in Tennesy. (SABR, Stock 1, File 3, Case 1274, p. 70.) He worked among Slavic people in America, and in 1921 returned home (Arhivum Akt Novykh v Varshave. Ministerstvo Wyznan' Religiiynykh i Osvichenia Publichnego. Referat vyznan' evangielickikh. [Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw. Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education. Department of evangelical churches.], Sygn. 1455, l. 215). In 1921 the first community of the Churches of Christ was started in the village of Staraya Ves', Belostok province. In 1924 Yaroshevich settled in Kobryn. (H. Satsevich and N. Hury, *Word and Life*, no. 4-6 [1995].) Ivan Bukovich was born in Sudzilovichi, Polesie province. In 1908 he went to the United States where in 1911 he was baptized in a Baptist church in Chicago and then studied at Moody Bible Institute (SABR, Stock 1, File 3, Case 1274, p. 70). He returned home in 1921 and began to work with Yaroshevich in 1923 (H. Satsevich, N. Hury, *Word and Life*, no. 4-6 [1995]).

¹⁸⁷ Georgiy Satsevich was born in Zelva. He studied in an Orthodox school and then in the Orthodox Seminary in Kaluga, Russia. In 1920 he was baptized as a believer in Kaluga and came back to Kobryn in 1922. (SABR, Stock 1, File 3, Case 1274, p. 70.)

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁸⁹ The Western part of Belarus, including Kobryn, was part of Poland at the time. See section 1.3.

¹⁹⁰ *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, p. 390 (SABR, Stock 1, File 3, Case 1274, p. 62).

¹⁹¹ Brest was also a Polish territory at the time.

Baptists.¹⁹² He actively ministered in Brest and its neighborhood, and in 1926, this church had over eight hundred members. Within a few years, nineteen evangelical churches were planted in the Brest region, and services were held in seventy other places.¹⁹³ In 1937, the Baptist Union with its center in Brest had eighty-five churches and two hundred and seventy-five branches with 13,800 believers.¹⁹⁴

The development of the evangelical movement in western Belarus (part of Poland since 1921) must be treated separately. Here the process of the penetration of evangelical ideas started later than in the eastern part but proved to be especially effective in church planting, although Poland directed its efforts at quenching the movement by using local administration and the police for this purpose. As the majority of Christian books were printed in Russian, the Protestant movement was considered to be “undesirable for Polish statehood.”¹⁹⁵ The authorities adopted a policy of a “neutral unfavorable attitude”¹⁹⁶ and imposed some restrictions to avoid Russification of western Belarus. They could forbid believers to teach choir singing, to distribute religious literature among the church members or to teach people religion.¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless, Evangelicals there managed to carry out dynamic missionary activity, organizing Bible and choir director courses, and distributing Bibles and New Testaments, because they had more freedom than their fellow believers in the eastern (Soviet) part of Belarus.¹⁹⁸ From 1922 to 1929, the number of followers increased eight times and reached 7,865.¹⁹⁹ Nowadays Baptist churches still enjoy the fruit of this activity. Kobryn, for example, has the largest Baptist house of prayer in Belarus.

However, opposition and persecution caused a considerable hindrance to the development of the movement. P.E. Ermakov in *Baptist* magazine recounts the ministry of Leontiy Demidovich Priymachenko, a former Orthodox deacon who founded the church in Nikolayevka,

¹⁹² Kovalenko, *Oblako svidetelei Khristovyykh*, p. 161. Luka Nikolaevich Dzekuts-Maley (1888-1955) is famous as a Belarusian religious and public figure, pastor, preacher and translator of the New Testament into Belarusian. On his life and ministry see A.I. Bokun, ed., *Lukaš Dziekuć-Maliej i Bielaruskija piaraklady Biblii* [Lukash Dzekuts-Maley and Belarusian translations of the Bible] (Brest: “Alternatyva,” 2011), p. 49.

¹⁹³ Stanislav Akinchyts, “120-letie Dzekuts-Maleya” [120th Dzekuts-Maley anniversary], *Krynitsa Zhyttsya*, no. 6 (2008): 15.

¹⁹⁴ Grygor'eva, Zavalniuk, Navitski, Filatava, *Kanfesii na Belarusi (kanets XVIII - XX st.)*, p. 213. More about the Baptist Union in Western Belarus, its organization and leadership can be found in T.V. Lisovskaya, “Struktura yevangel'sko-baptistskogo dvizheniya Zapadnoy Belarusi v 1921-1939 gg.” [The Structure of the Evangelical-Baptist Movement of Western Belarus in 1921-1939], *Vestnik Brestskogo universiteta* [Brest university messenger], no. 6 (84), (2013): 22-23.

¹⁹⁵ T.V. Lisovskaya, “Deyatel'nost' protestantskikh obshchin i organizatsii v Zapadnoi Belarusi v 1921-1939 gg.” [The Activity of Protestant Communities and Organizations in Western Belarus in 1921-1939], *Ves'nik Grodenskaga dzyarzhavnaga universiteta imya Y. Kupala* [Grodno state university of Y. Kupala messenger] Series 1, 2 (67) (2008): 81.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ SABR, Stock 1, File 3, Case 1274, p. 62.

¹⁹⁹ Lisovskaya, “Deyatel'nost' protestantskikh obshchin i organizatsii v Zapadnoi Belarusi v 1921-1939 gg,” p. 77.

Gomel district. The account describes the circumstances in which the church was planted:

After his arrest, [Prymachenko's] believers began to have meetings again secretly in the night. At one such meeting, a crowd of about 30 people suddenly broke in. They broke the windows and doors and grabbed three people, including Prymachenko's brother. They began to beat them to death and threw Prymachenko's brother on the snow, where he spent the whole night until morning. In the morning his father and mother came. . . and washed and bandaged his wounds. . . Suddenly, the mob appeared again, led by a sergeant, to lynch the family. . . Prymachenko's brother begged the Lord to spare his life.²⁰⁰

A significant factor in spreading evangelical doctrine was migrations primarily resulting from wars and economic difficulties in Belarus. In such circumstances, ideas always spread faster. This helped Belarusians learn about the new faith and adopt it in Southern Ukraine and Siberia as well as in North America and Germany. Along with this, the missionary activities of Evangelicals from the neighboring territories of the Russian Empire and, later, Poland led to the planting of new churches. For example, Polish, German and Baltic missionaries worked in northwestern Belarus, which was predominately Catholic.²⁰¹ However, as Catholics kept allegiance to their church, their relationship to the evangelical Christians was either indifferent or hostile.²⁰²

3.2. Historical and interethnic relationships in identity and worship formation

Various traditions contributed to the shaping of the evangelical movement in Belarus. They were represented by Ukrainian and Baltic congregations which included Belarusian territory as part of their mission field.²⁰³ Polish and German Baptists, Evangelicals of the USA and Russia played an important role in this movement through education in theological schools (in Lodz, Warsaw, Hamburg, Chicago, Knoxville, St. Petersburg) and missionary work. Involvement of international organizations was particularly high in western Belarus.²⁰⁴ A variety of influences certainly contributed. On the one hand, positively to the richness of expression of worship, especially in music ministry and its broadness and openness. On the other hand, divisions and tensions now occurred between people belonging to different traditions, particularly Evangelical Christians and Baptists. Together all the influences led to "the unique social and theological status of the Baptist movement, its complex, dual and combined European-Russian, universal-local, Protestant-Orthodox cross-cultural and theological

²⁰⁰ P.E. Ermakov, "Biographiya brata L.D. Prymachenko" [Biography of brother L.D. Prymachenko], *Baptist*, no. 3 (1927): 27.

²⁰¹ Lisovskaya, *Neoprotestantizm v Zapadnoi Belarusi v 1921-1939 gg.*, pp. 30-31.

²⁰² Research of the conversion cases during the Second World War revealed that the Baptist churches grew mainly due to the conversion of Orthodox people (79,1%) and to a lesser extent due to Catholics (4,5%) (Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptizm i Baptisty*, p. 34). However, the ministry was carried out mainly within the Orthodox territory. However, Latvian missionaries established a church in Grodno, where the majority were Catholics. (Lisovskaya, "Novye protestantskie denominatsii na zapadnobelorusskikh zemliakh v kontse XIX – 20gg. XX veka," p. 42.)

²⁰³ Lisovskaya, *Neoprotestantizm v Zapadnoi Belarusi v 1921-1939 gg.*, p. 31..

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

identity,”²⁰⁵ which shaped the tradition of worship services in the churches of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union, including Belarus.

3.2.1. Russian orientation

Studying the history of the origin and spread of the evangelical movement in Belarus indicates two basic vectors of influences. In many cases the awakening was conditioned by relations within a Russian-speaking environment, whereas others were more determined by relations with German and English-speaking believers. It is difficult to distinguish clearly between them since these sources often exerted indirect influence by coming to Belarus via Russia and Ukraine, and the types were often mixed. For example, the development of the Baptist movement in the north-west of the Belarusian lands in the beginning of the twentieth century was associated with the activity in 1923-1939 of “Wilhelm Fetler’s Mission,” which supported missionaries in Poland (Western Belarus). Wilhelm (or William) Fetler, who was born on the outskirts of the Russian Empire in Latvia and received his religious education in London and St. Petersburg,²⁰⁶ trained evangelists and missionaries for Russia and visited Grodno himself. Fetler was a strong Rusophile, yet his ministry was supported by western resources.²⁰⁷

However, it is possible and important to trace the main factors of influence in order to understand the nature of traditional worship which developed on Slavic soil but also was strongly/significantly influenced by the West. Close connections within the limits of one country (especially in Eastern Belarus), culture and language, active missionary work of evangelical Christians and Baptists from Russia and Ukraine all led to the development of new communities of “Russian” formation in Gomel and Rogachev districts, Mogilev region, in Vitebsk region, and later in Minsk and Belarusian Polesie. It is not surprising that early believers in Gomel district called themselves followers of “a new-born Russian brotherhood.”²⁰⁸

The main factor of influence here was the Russian language. Although in 1920 a Baptist church pastor in Brest, Dzekuts-Maley under the editorship of Anton Lutskevich translated the New Testament from Church Slavonic into the Belarusian language,²⁰⁹ this translation was not

²⁰⁵ Cherenkov, *Litsom k litsu. Evangel'skaya vera v sovremennoi kul'ture*, pp. 66-67.

²⁰⁶ Krzysztof Bednarczyk, *Historiya Zborow Baptystow w Polsce do 1939 roku* [History of Baptist Churches in Poland until 1939] (Warszawa: “Słowo Prawdy,” 1997), p. 119.

²⁰⁷ Fetler was also known by his adopted Russian name, Basil Malof. For a (rather hagiographic) biography of Fetler, see J.A. Stewart, *A Man in a Hurry: The Story of the Life and Work of Pastor Basil A. Malof* (Asheville: The Russian Bible Society, 1968).

²⁰⁸ Yanouskaya, *Khrystsiyanskaya tsarkva u Belarusi 1863 - 1914 gg.*, p. 69.

²⁰⁹ A. Unuchak, “S'vyatar, patryyot, perakladchyk” [Priest, Patriot and Translator], in *Dziekuć-Maliej i bielaruskija piaraklady Biblii*, ed. Bokun, pp. 8-13. New Testament and Psalms were published as one book in 1931 (Ibid., p. 8).

adopted as the text for worship and reading in evangelical churches.²¹⁰ The Russian Synodal translation was and continues to be used as the main translation. To this day, the Russian language has held a dominant position in the evangelical churches of Belarus as the language for worship.²¹¹

Belarusian Evangelicals used newspapers, magazines, and books mostly in Russian, which remains true at the beginning of the twenty-first century as well. The insignificant number of publications in Belarusian in western Belarus can be explained by the fact that in the early years of the movement, the majority of religious literature was designated for use by all the communities in Poland,²¹² as well as for Russian-speaking believers in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States, Moldova, and other territories. Widespread knowledge of the Russian language significantly increased Belarusians' opportunities and their access to Christian literature, and publications printed in Russia and Ukraine enriched their ecclesial life. This is especially true with regard to singing. Hymns (in Russian) published by the leader of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians (AUCEC), Ivan Prokhanov,²¹³ were especially important in forming the spirit of worship services. Prokhanov published 1037 lyrics, 624 of which he wrote himself, including the very popular "O, Obraz sovershennyi" (Oh, Perfect Image), "Za evangel'skuyu veru" (For Evangelical Faith), "Vzoydem na Golgofu, moy brat" (Let Us Go up to Calvary, My Brother).²¹⁴ Prokhanov also translated 413 lyrics from English and German, many of which have become classics for Baptist music ministry, such as "Slushaite povest' liubvi v prostote" (Simple love story), "Ne proidi, Iisus, menia Ty" (Pass me not, o gentle Savior), "Lyublyu, Gospod', Tvoy dom" (I Love Thy House, Lord), and others.²¹⁵

Evangelical believers in Belarus, and people with similar beliefs in other territories of the Russian Empire and later in the Soviet Union, were brought together not only by the same Bible

²¹⁰ The full translation of the Bible from Church Slavonic language into Belarusian by Vasilii Semukha, issued in 2002, is generally not used in worship, with rare exceptions. On Bible translations into Belarusian see A. Bokun, "Gistoryya pierakladu Biblii na bielarskuyu movu" [History of translating the Bible into Belarusian], in Bokun, ed., *Lukaš Dziekuć-Maliej and Belarusian translations of the Bible*, p. 34. In 2016 there were three translations of the entire Bible into Belarusian, and about ten translations of the New Testament.

²¹¹ On the use of Belarusian in worship see footnote 1014.

²¹² T.V. Lisovskaya, "Problema ispol'zovaniya belorusskogo yazyka v deyatel'nosti baptistskikh i pyatidesyatnicheskikh obshchin Zapadnoi Belarusi v 1921-1939 gg" [The Problem of Use of Belarusian Language in the Activities of Baptist and Pentecostal Communities in Western Belarus in 1921-1939], in *Slavyanskije yazyki: sistemno-opisatel'ny i sociokul'turny aspekty issledovaniya. Material IV Mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-metodicheskoi konferentsii*, ch. 2 [Slavic Languages: Systemic-Descriptive and Socio-Cultural Aspects of the Study. The Material of the IV International Scientific Conference, Part 2] (Brest, Brestskiy gosudarstvennyy universitet im. A.S. Pushkina, 2010): 77.

²¹³ Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov (1869-1935) – a prominent figure of evangelical movement, the founder of the All-Russian Union of Evangelical Christians, as well as writer, poet and translator. See the book by V.A. Popov, *I.S. Prokhanov, Stranitsy zhizni* (Saint-Peterburg: "Bibliya dlya vsekh," 1996) and Prokhanov's autobiography *V kotle Rossii* [In the Cauldron of Russia], (Chicago: World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians, 1992).

²¹⁴ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, nos. 31, 185, 420. Ludvig Shenderovsky, *Ivan Prokhanov* [Ivan Prokhanov] (Toronto: "Evangel'skaya vera," 1986), p. 117.

²¹⁵ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, nos. 1, 30, 248.

texts, songs and Christian books, but also by personal relationships. As stated earlier, many Belarusians came to faith through the ministry of Christians in Ukraine, Siberia, or St. Petersburg. They also maintained relations with various figures of influence, such as Baptists in Gomel district, who kept links with their coreligionists from Southern provinces in Russia. Believers in St. Petersburg were sending financial assistance and books to believers in Chechersk in Rogachev districts,²¹⁶ which demonstrates the relationship with Vasiliy Pashkov's followers.²¹⁷ The leader of the Baptists in Brest, Luka Dzekuts-Malei, studied and completed Bible courses for Evangelical Christians in St. Petersburg. The churches of Evangelical Christians, which had an influential center in St. Petersburg, were also actively working with Baptist churches in Brest.²¹⁸ Mina Veresov, who founded churches in Bobruisk and the surrounding villages of Bortniki, Dabas, and Vorotyn in Mogilev region,²¹⁹ along with Vasiliy Velichko, the presbyter in the town of Slutsk from 1920 to 1928, had also completed courses for Evangelical Christians in St. Petersburg. Public worship began in Mogilev in 1917 with some Evangelical Christians involved, including Eumen Prohorov.²²⁰ Evangelicals of Belarusian Polesie established close relations with Baptists and Evangelical Christians in Ukrainian Polesie and Volynia. Later ties with the center of the Baptist movement in Moscow greatly determined the form of worship for many churches in Belarus: the central and the only Baptist Church in Moscow during the Soviet era became *the* model.

Close ties to other Russian-speaking communities in addition to ties within Belarus were leading to the unification of doctrinal beliefs and practices in different regions of the country. Existing differences were leveled even more following the integration of all the evangelical churches of the Soviet Union into one AUCECB in 1944.²²¹ For example, doctrinal similarity and the lack of strong national leaders in Belarus transformed the Churches of Christ into

²¹⁶ Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptizm i Baptisty*, p. 17; *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, p. 382.

²¹⁷ Vasiliy Alexandrovich Pashkov (1831-1902) was a retired Colonel of the Guards, a follower of the English preacher Lord Radstock, and one of the founding fathers of Evangelical Christian movement in the Russian Empire (common people typically called them "pashkovtsy"). On Pashkov's ministry see Sharyl Corrado, *Philosophiya sluzheniya polkovnika Pashkova* [The Philosophy of Ministry of the Colonel Vasiliy Pashkov] (Saint-Peterburg: "Bibliya dlya vsekh," 2005) which was originally published as "The Philosophy of Ministry of Colonel Vasiliy Pashkov," (MA Thesis, Wheaton College, 2000); Geoffry H. Ellis and L. Wesley Jones, *Drugaya revolyutsiya. Rossiiskoye evangelicheskoye probuzhdeniye* [The Other Revolution. Russian Evangelical Revival] (Saint-Peterburg: "Vita International," 1999), pp. 87-128. Originally published as *The Other Revolution: Russian Evangelical Awakenings*. Abilene: ACU. Press, 1996.

²¹⁸ In the Brest area Baptists and Evangelical Christian churches maintained close connections up to the integration into one union. The integration happened in June 1923 in Brest at the Congress of Baptists and Evangelical Christians. The union was called an Association of Evangelical Christians and Baptists of Poland. The Association broke apart at the 4th Congress in Brest on March 17-19, 1925, due to conflicts in the leadership of the Association and a different understanding of certain issues, such as military service and the attitude towards the Pentecostal church. (Lisovskaya, "Struktura yevangel'sko-baptistskogo dvizheniya Zapadnoy Belarusi v 1921-1939 gg.," pp. 22-23; Bokun, *Lukaš Dziekuć-Maliej i Bielaruskija piaraklady Biblii*, pp. 162-164.)

²¹⁹ *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, p. 383.

²²⁰ Ol'ga Konzevenko, *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov (EKHB) v Mogileve* [Evangelical Christians-Baptists story in Mogilev] (Minsk: Minsk Theological Seminary, 2002, Unpublished).

²²¹ See footnote 5.

Evangelical-Christian Baptists.²²² Today in Kobrin, the former center of the Churches of Christ movement, second and third generation members of that church think of themselves as Baptists, and Kobrin itself is considered as one of the centers of the Baptist movement in Belarus.²²³

Thus, the challenging environment, the waves of persecution, political revolutions, two world wars, and difficult economic conditions under which the churches were developing in Belarus, significantly contributed to uniformity in the expression of faith. The distinguishable characteristics of different evangelical movements were melding and getting lost in the “melting pot” of the imperial and communist regimes. Consequently, we cannot talk of the uniqueness of a “pure Belarusian” style of worship, but of the uniqueness of the traditional Russian-speaking Baptist service in general with its emphasis on the sermon, its purpose to build up the believers and to evangelize non-believers, its restraint in the expression of the emotions, Christocentrism and various other features that are explored in the following chapters.

Thus, it is possible to talk about the “Russian orientation”²²⁴ of the evangelical movement in Belarus. Temporary transition under Polish jurisdiction in 1921-1939 and the direct influence of Western Protestantism did not break this dynamic. That is why in order to understand the character, structure and the features of public worship in evangelical churches of Belarus we can refer to worship not only in Belarus, but also in neighboring countries which were once integrated by a common language and state. Furthermore, an analysis of traditional worship services in Baptist churches of Belarus can conversely be helpful for understanding worship services in many other churches which share a common historical and religious context.

3.2.2. *Western sources*

The connections with other Russian-speaking seats of awakening and their role in the formation of the evangelical churches in Belarus are indisputable, especially in the early period leading up to 1920s. Additionally important, however, have been the western sources of influence. Many of the churches in Belarus, as noted earlier, were founded by Belarusians who came to faith in Germany or the United States. The roots of their practice, therefore, could be traced back to the western evangelical churches that have played a key role in forming the

²²² Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptizm i Baptisty*, p. 29. With regard to the Churches of Christ, see footnote 5.

²²³ On the relationship of the Churches of Christ with other denominations see Andrus' Unuchak, “Tserkvy Khrystovyya na Kobrynshchynе u 1920-ya gg.: da pytannya denaminatsyy nay toyesnas'tsi i arganizatsyy naga stanaulennya” [The Churches of Christ in Kobrin Area in the 1920s: The Issues of Confessional Identity and Organizational Development], in *Yevanhielskaya tsarkva Bielarusi: gistoryya i suchasnasc'.* Vypusk II: (da 500-hoddzia Mikalaja Radzivila Chornaha): zbornik materyjalau II Mizhnarodnaj navukova-praktychnaj kanfierentsyi, ed. A. Bokun, pp. 203-213; Andrus' Unuchak, “Centr Abjadnańnia Cerkvau Khrystovych u Kobrynje (1929-1930 hh.)” [Union Center of the Churches of Christ in Kobryn], in *Yevanhielskaya tsarkva Bielarusi: gistoryya i suchasnasc'.*, ed. A. Bokun, pp. 178-185. It should be noted, however, that some Church of Christ ministers and members split from the Baptist Union in 1926. SABR, Stock 1, File 10, Case 2313, pp. 29-30; Case 2279, p. 38.

²²⁴ Lisovskaya, “Novye protestantskie denominatsii na zapadnobelorusskikh zemliakh v kontse XIX – 20 gg. XX veka,” p. 48.

“genetic code” of their gatherings. For example, extempore prayer differed (and still differs) in a Baptist gathering so greatly from the Orthodox liturgy that it seemed very strange to Orthodox people who were often struck by its novelty and singularity. In his memoirs, Dzekuts-Malei notes that “random visitors, who were neighbors of the house hosts, looked at me, at the congregation, and heard our ‘one-of-a-kind’ prayers and they were very surprised with this new faith, asking, Where did you borrow it from? What does it mean?”²²⁵

Historians and theologians have pointed to the influence of western Christians over the Russian-speaking Baptists, including Belarusians, and the various ties contributing to that. Alexander Karev, an outstanding figure in AUCECB, states that Baptists in southern Russia were closely connected with German Baptists and adopted from them the structure of the community system, including “laying on of hands on each baptized person after baptism.”²²⁶ Johannes Dyck also notes that when Vasiliy Pavlov returned from Hamburg,²²⁷ the community in Tiflis (current Tbilisi, Georgia) adopted Johann Oncken’s model of pastoral unity of command,²²⁸ and the community order was determined by the Hamburg Confession.²²⁹ The connection with German Baptists contributed to the formation of doctrinal practices, mission organization, the understanding of church discipline and the order of worship “by its strict organization, highly developed dogma and moral program, and by its missionary emphasis.”²³⁰

²²⁵ Stepan Pekun, “Luka Nikolaevich Dzekuts-Maley: zhizn’ i sluzhenie” [Luka Nikolaevich Dzekuts-Maley: Life and Ministry], *Krynitsa Zhyttsya*, no. 2 (2000), p. 8. Timofey Cheprasov thinks, that “The absence of rigid liturgy, extemporaneous prayer, and preaching with the anointing of the Holy Spirit were the characteristics that attracted many people to the baptistic churches at the early stages of their development” (*Like Ripples on Water*, p. 65).

²²⁶ A.V. Karev, “Russkoe evangel’sko-baptistskoe dvizhenie” [Russian Evangelical Baptist Movement], *Al’mankh po istorii russkogo baptisma* [Almanac on the History of Russian Baptists] (Sanct-Peterburg: “Bibliya dlya vsekh,” 1997): 151.

²²⁷ Vasiliy Gur’evich Pavlov (1854-1924) was one of the founding fathers and first leaders of the Baptist Union in Russia, a missionary, preacher and an editor of *Baptist* magazine. He was among the first members of the early Russian Baptist community in Transcaucasia. See more about Pavlov in V.A. Popov, *Stopy Blagovestnika* [The Feet of an Evangelist] (Moskva: “Blagovestnik,” 1996); Kovalenko, *Oblako svidetelei Khristovykh*, pp. 38-42; Gyunter Viske and Genrikh Leven ml., *Oni sledovali za Iisusom* [They Followed Jesus] (Cherkassy: “Smirna,” 2001), pp. 113-127. In 1885 Pavlov visited the Gomel region and baptized the first Baptist believers there (*Baptist*, no. 3 [1927]: 27-28).

²²⁸ Johann Gerhard Oncken (1800-1884) was a German Baptist who was often called the “the ‘father’ of the continental Baptists.” Oncken helped direct and guide the growth of Baptists throughout Germany and across much of Europe for half a century. (Ian M. Randall, *Communities of Conviction. Baptist Beginning in Europe* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2009), pp. 71-87.)

²²⁹ Johannes Dyck, “Stanovlenie evangel’skogo baptistskogo bratstva v Rossii (1860-1887)” [Formation of the Evangelical Baptist Brotherhood in Russia (1860-1887)], in *140 let rossijskomu baptizmu. Proshloe, nastoyashchee, perspektivy*. Conference material. [140th Anniversary of Russia’s Baptists. Past, Present and Prospects] (Moskva, October 19-20, 2007), p. 5.

In 1876 Pavlov translated the Hamburg Baptist Confession into Russian and edited it; the Confession was put together in 1847 by Oncken along with G.W. Lehmann and J.W. Köbner. The document became a model for other confessions of Russian Baptists and Evangelical Christians. (*Istoriya evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, p. 438.) For further information on the Hamburg Baptist Confession and its influence on Slavic Baptist churches, see Yaroslav Pyzh, “The Confessional Community as the Ecclesiological Core of the Baptists in the Soviet Union.”

²³⁰ Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost’*, p. 23. An example of the formative influences of German Baptists may be seen in the practice of the Lord’s Supper. The Baptists in Belarus accepted a “closed” table, introduced by Oncken, with the prerequisite that communicants must have been baptized as believers, as faith and

German Christians contributed to the content as well as to the spirit of Baptist worship in Belarus. Studying the nature of spirituality in Russian-speaking churches, Gregory Nichols adds German Pietism to the list of the sources of evangelical forms of spirituality as a result of the spread of German Pietism in Europe.²³¹ J.G. Davis noted that in Germany and the Scandinavian countries where Baptists arose out of the pietistic ferment of previous centuries, worship still contains strong overtones of pietistic devotional life. Bible reading and meditation, spontaneous prayer and introspective hymns characterize such services,²³² and these characteristics are clearly manifested in the worship of the Belarusian Baptists.

Churches in England and North America also influenced Baptists in Belarus. Thus Wilhelm Kahle argues that Russian-speaking believers build their denominational structure on English and American Baptist models.²³³ Connection with English believers tended to be embodied in greater freedom, flexibility and spontaneity in gatherings, which were viewed as a manifestation of the Spirit in worshipping God, and, at the same time, the requirement of godly order in leading services.²³⁴ Among other characteristics, we can outline the attention to studying and preaching the Bible in mass assemblies.²³⁵ The American revivalist tradition may well have enhanced an evangelistic thrust in traditional worship: lively singing, testimonies about the freedom and forgiveness which have come in Christ, spontaneous prayers “in the Spirit,” sermons closing with a call to come to Christ, and poems to aid the conversion of sinners.²³⁶

Numerous songs, especially ones which could be traced to the revival tradition of Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey, were also employed. As a result of his visit to western Belarus in 1926, a correspondent from *The Times* observed that

thousands of farmers turn away from traditional services in the Russian Orthodox Church and they have their meetings according to the evangelical pattern as it has been done in Great Britain and America over the last fifty years. Revival hymns are very popular; people listen to a tuning fork and all the congregation unanimously joins in singing. Such worship services of ‘believers,’ as these people are called, are so popular that, in one of the villages where I addressed a large congregation, the local parish church was almost empty.²³⁷

baptism cannot be separated from each other. Also, children may not partake in Communion. (Kahle, *Evangel'skie khristiane v Rossii i Sovetskom Soyuze*, p. 57.)

²³¹ Gregory Nichols, “Evangelical Spirituality and Russian Baptists,” in *Ethical Thinking at the Crossroads of European Reasoning*, ed. Parush R. Parushev, Ovidiu Creanga, Brian Brock, eds (Praha: IBTS, 2007): 206-208.

²³² J.G. Davies, ed., *A Dictionary of Liturgy & Worship* (London: SGM Press LTD, 1972), p. 66.

²³³ Kahle, *Evangel'skie khristiane v Rossii i Sovetskom Soyuze*, p. 539.

²³⁴ Cf. McKibbens, Jr., “Our Baptist Heritage in Worship,” p. 63.

²³⁵ “British Baptists. . . extend a legacy of great preaching in Baptist worship” (Ibid).

²³⁶ Cf. McKibbens, “Our Baptist Heritage in Worship,” p. 64.

²³⁷ J. Hay Colligan, “White Russia - A Visitor's Impression,” *The Times* (7 September, 1926), in *Nyabesnae polymya. Pratestantskaya tsarkva i belaruski natsyyanal'ny rukh na pachatku XX stagoddzya* [Heavenly Fire. The Protestant Church and Belarusian National Movement in the Beginning of the 20th Century] by Guy Picarda (Minsk: “Knigazbor,” 2006): 15.

Decades later, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association's mass evangelistic crusades in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus continued the same trend. Some of the most popular hymns which represented the English-speaking influence on the formation of the spirit of worship and emotional expressions of faith in Belarusian churches include "Velikiy Bog" (How Great Thou Art), "Vernost' Tvoya velika, o, moy Bozhe" (Great is Thy Faithfulness), "Vsevyshnemu slava" (To God be the Glory), "Chto za Druga my imeyem" (What a Friend We Have in Jesus), "Techet li zhizn' mirno, podobno reke" (When Peace Like a River), amongst others.²³⁸

We can also note the influence of literature, which was mostly characteristic of the Anglo-American relations, taking into account the popularity of such preachers as Dwight Moody and Charles Spurgeon in Russian-speaking areas. Moody's *Pleasure and Profit in Bible study* and sermons by Spurgeon were very popular until the beginning of twenty-first century and they are still in great demand in Russian-speaking communities.²³⁹

In addition to the Christian songs and books, the education of several key Belarusian Baptists in the United States contributed to the influence of Anglo-American spirituality in worship. The aforementioned Fetler sent a number of graduates of the Bible Institute in Philadelphia to engage in ministry in Belarus. These included Demid Iosiphovich Polyakov, Korney Petrovich Yurzhits, and Pavel Afanasievich Aksyuchits. Aksyuchits became the founder and pastor of ECB community in Borisov, Minsk region. Polyakov founded an ECB church in the village of Podaresie, Starodorozhski district, Minsk region and was also a director of the community choir.²⁴⁰ Ivan Vensky was the pastor of Dziarechyn community in Zelva district, Grodno region. He had studied at a seminary in the United States for three years before coming to western Belarus as a missionary in 1922.²⁴¹

Furthermore, Western evangelical leaders had an indirect impact on the Baptists in Belarus through such well-known figures of the Russian revival as Lord Radstock and Ivan Kargel. The ministry of Granville Waldegrave Radstock²⁴² was characterized by several motifs

²³⁸ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, nos. 93, 119, 136, 589, 707. "Your Faithfulness Is Great, oh, My God" originally written as "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," "Glory to the Almighty" as "To God Be the Glory," "What a Friend We Have" as "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," and "If Life Goes Smoothly Like a River" as "It Is Well with My Soul."

²³⁹ D.L. Moody, *Pol'za i naslazhdeniye ot izucheniya Biblii* [Pleasure and Profit in Bible study] (Korntal': (Svet na Vostoke, 1990). In the 1990s many Spurgeon's works were published, including *Blagodat'yu vy spaseny* [You Are Saved by Grace] (1990), *Sokrovishcha obetovaniy Bozh'ikh* [Treasures of God's Promises] (1991), *Izbrannoye* [Selected Works] (1993), *Sperdzhenskiye konspekty propovedey* [Spurgeon's Sermon Notes] (1996), *Propoved' dlya ishchushchikh Boga* [A Sermon for Those Who Seek God] (1996), *Samyye chitayemyye propovedi* [Most Read Sermons] (1997), *Lektsii moim studentam* [Lectures to My Students] (1998), *12 propovedey o Svyatom Dukhe* [12 Sermons on the Holy Spirit] (1999), and *Evangel'skiye propovedi* [Evangelical Sermons] (1999).

²⁴⁰ *Baptist*, no. 3, 9 (1927); *Baptist Ukrainy* [Baptist of Ukraine], no. 11 (1928 r.); *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, pp. 384-387.

²⁴¹ SABR, Stock 1482, File 2, Case 1, p. 51.

²⁴² Lord Radstock (1833-1913). An English preacher who organized prayer meetings and discussions on Christian topics primarily for the Russian aristocracy in St. Petersburg from 1874 to 1878. Evangelical Christians-Baptists and Pentecostals consider him to be one of the founding fathers of the evangelical movement in Russia. See

which can be found in many Russian-speaking churches: the yearning for revival and holiness,²⁴³ commitment to restore New Testament Christianity through belief in the absolute authority of the Bible,²⁴⁴ premillennial theology of holiness, and a precritical method of biblical interpretation, which were typical of the Anglo-American evangelical movement in the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁴⁵

Ivan Kargel²⁴⁶ was one of the most popular and respected writers among Belarusian churches. Gregory Nichols argues that Russian-speaking churches have adopted many characteristics from Kargel and other leaders of the Russian Evangelical Christian movement,²⁴⁷ “such as a distinct revivalist flare in their services and preaching style, a strong yearning for a quietness of the soul before God, a desire for holiness and a mild disdain for systematic theology which is restrictive.”²⁴⁸

3.2.3. Local or foreign, or both?

Modern Baptist researcher Andrey Puzynin suggests that after the Bolshevik Revolution, along with the memory of its ‘aristocratic period’, the western origins of the Baptist tradition, or rather its Evangelical Christian elements, were suppressed in the historical memory.²⁴⁹ The Anglo-American tradition of holiness was then reinterpreted as a native Russian, original and

Ellis and Jones, *Drugaya revolyutsiya*, pp. 63-86; David Fountain, *Lord Radstok i dukhovnoye probuzhdeniye v Rossii* [Lord Radstock and a Spiritual Awakening in Russia] (Odessa: Alfom, 2001), originally published as *Lord Radstock and the Russian Awakening* (Revival Literature, 1988); Kovalenko, *Oblako svidetelei Khristovyykh*, pp. 69-72. Some interesting information about his ministry in Russia can be found in a story by Russian writer Nikolai Leskov, “Velikosvetsky raskol” [The Great Secular Split], in N.S. Leskov, *Zerkalo zhizni* [The Mirror of Life] (Saint-Peterburg: “Bibliya dlya vsekh,” 1999): 32-121.

²⁴³ A.I. Mitskevich, *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov* [The History of Evangelic Christians-Baptists] (Moskva: Rossiyskiy soyuz evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov, 2007), p. 85.

²⁴⁴ Ellis and Jones, *Drugaya revolyutsiya*, p. 80.

²⁴⁵ Puzynin, *Traditsiya evangel'skikh khristian. Izuchenie samoidentifikatsii i bogosloviya ot momenta ee zarozhdeniya do nashikh dnei*, p. 56.

²⁴⁶ Ivan Veniaminovich Kargel (1849-1937) was an important figure in the evangelical movement in the Russian Empire, a writer, theologian and pastor of St. Petersburg church of Evangelical Christians. He is the author of a number of famous books, such as the commentaries on the Epistle to Romans and the Book of Revelation, *Svet iz teni budushchikh blag* (Light out of the Shadow of Future Blessings), *V kakom otnoshenii ty k Dukhu Sviatomu* (In What Kind of Relationships to the Holy Spirit), and others. For more about Kargel, see M.S. Karetnikova, “Ivan Veniaminovich Kargel” [Ivan Veniaminovich Kargel], in I.V. Kargel, *Sobraniye sochineniy* [Collection of Works], (Saint-Peterburg: “Bibliya dlya vsekh,” 2000): 684-688; Gregory L. Nichols, “Ivan Kargel and the Fulfillment of Revival: The Fullness of Salvation Which Leads to Sanctification,” *Baptistic Theologies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 23-39; I.N. Skopina, “Iz biografii I.V. Kargelya i yego docherey” [From the Biography of I.V. Kargelya and His Daughters], in I.V. Kargel, ed., *Sobraniye sochineniy* [Collection of Works]. Saint-Peterburg: “Bibliya dlya vsekh” (2000): 689-670. See also a detailed research by Gregory L. Nichols, *The Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality: A Study of Ivan V. Kargel (1849-1937)* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011).

²⁴⁷ For Evangelical Christians see “Subject of the Study” in Chapter 1.

²⁴⁸ Nichols, “Evangelical Spirituality and Russian Baptists,” p. 206.

²⁴⁹ Puzynin uses the term “aristocratic period,” to denote a time during which aristocrats came to faith such as guards Colonel V.A. Pashkov, Count A.P. Bobrinsky, Baron M.M. Korf, Princess V.F. Gagarina, E.I. Chertkova, S.P. Liven and others as a result of Radstock’s activity. See also S.P. Liven, *Dukhovnoye probuzhdeniye v Rossii. Vospominaniya knyazhny S.P. Liven* [Spiritual revival in Russia. Memories of Princess S.P. Lieven] (Chicago: Slavic Gospel Press, 1989).

popular movement.²⁵⁰ Indeed, some researchers emphasize the local origin of the Russian-speaking brotherhood, primarily referring to the action of the Holy Spirit, spiritual hunger, and the influence of the translation of Scripture into Russian language.²⁵¹ Some non-native researchers, including Gregory Nichols and Albert Wardin, also indicate the originality and uniqueness of Russian-speaking Baptists. Nichols notes “that the Russian Baptists have developed independently of the Baptists world-wide. This is due to both the Tsarist and Soviet restrictions concerning communication to the outside world.”²⁵² Wardin agrees that German Baptists “took advantage of the evangelical movement already developing in the Russian Empire. They were not initiators of the movement but facilitators in moving it to what they considered were more consistent biblical principles such as separation from non-evangelical churches and believer’s baptism by immersion.”²⁵³ The argument is put forward that these groups expressed their faith naturally rather than copying foreign forms.

The first worship services started in small groups of relatives or neighbors. From the beginning they resembled a Bible study or discussions on spiritual issues, with no final definite form. Their worship was characterized by simplicity of structure and content. Indeed, it would be more appropriate to call them “gatherings”: groups of like-minded and sympathetic people getting together. To take an example of the first worship services in Gomel, it is known that “Shtundists” who arrived from Ukraine rented an apartment where “in the evening they gathered in a family circle and were reading the Gospel and singing Psalms.”²⁵⁴ In the same way, opponents of “the sectarians” of Rachkany, Slutsk district accused them of “assembling in a house, reading the Bible and singing their chants. It’s their whole worship service.”²⁵⁵ As time passed, worship services developed but the general scheme remained the same. Notes by a Christian who attended a service in Brest in October 1922 describe how a worship service appeared in its more developed form:

On Saturday night, brother Feodor Trihonyuk harnessed a horse and we went to Brest-Litovsk to the service of God’s children. We drove all night and at dawn came into the city. At 10 a.m., brothers and sisters as well as visitors gathered from all the neighborhoods of Brest and the house was filled. The meeting was opened by singing “I Hear Thy Voice” and prayer. Brother Dzekuts-Maley read from the

²⁵⁰ Puzyrin, *Tradiciya evangel’skikh khristian*, p. 333. This statement appears to be true in regard to the twentieth century or older generations of Christians. In contrast, very few young Christians in ECB churches would be familiar with the names of Radstock and Kargel. The voices they hear as a call for sanctification come from contemporary popular western writers and preachers such as John MacArthur and John Piper.

²⁵¹ See *Istoriya evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, pp. 85-93; P.M., “Istoki evangel’skogo dvizheniya v Rossii” [Backgrounds of Evangelical Movement in Russia], *Vestnik Istiny*, no. 6 (2007): 35; S.N. Savinskiy, “Istoriya russko-ukrainskogo baptizma. Uchebnoye posobiye” [History of Russian-Ukrainian Baptists. Study Manual] (Odessa: Odesskaya bogoslovskaya seminaria, Bogomyslie), 1995.

²⁵² Nichols, “Evangelical Spirituality and Russian Baptists,” p. 205.

²⁵³ Wardin, “How Indigenous Was the Baptist Movement in the Russian Empire,” p. 36.

²⁵⁴ Leonid Kolesnichenko, “Gomel’skoi tserkvi 100 let” [100 anniversary of the Gomel Church], *Krynitsa Zhittsya*, no. 3 (2007), p. 8.

²⁵⁵ CSHA, Stock 136, File 4, Case 64, p. 5b; Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptizm i Baptisty*, p. 19.

prophecy of Isaiah 12, and instructed brothers and sisters. Two brothers then shared about Christ. The meeting ended at 12 o'clock. After the meeting, four people gave their hearts to the Lord.²⁵⁶

However, the thesis of primarily native rather than foreign origins does not answer all the questions posed by the history and practice of worship. Another point of view, already expressed by revival movement participants in the early twentieth century, allows for a greater balance. "The evangelical movement in Russia was not original; it sprouted from the sources that had been provided for us by our Christian brothers from overseas during the great evangelical revival in Germany, England and America."²⁵⁷ Even earlier a Russian evangelist and pastor Feodor Balikhin noted that "the light of God's truth began to shine in our country coming from Germany."²⁵⁸ In his 1911 article Mikhail Timoshenko declared, "The Baptist movement is not foreign but clearly international. As all people on the earth need bread, water and air, so also all need spiritual nourishment."²⁵⁹ This kind of thought is also developed by a secular scholar who would have been free from denominational prejudices:

Although there were valid historical premises for church formation according to the Baptist pattern which was related to the centuries-old legacy of "heresy" and sects, the church received its definitive genetic code from foreign missionaries, and it took a while for the Baptist movement to acquire its own inner impulses, and its own energy to develop itself.²⁶⁰

The case of Baptist worship practice in Belarus therefore reveals how western and local traditions merged and gave birth to an Eastern Slavic form of evangelical Christianity, and demonstrates that that process took place from the very beginning. An outstanding example of this is the aforementioned heritage of music and traditional hymns used in worship services. A collection of songs, *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, which is the definitive resource for traditional singing in the worship of Baptist Churches in Belarus, contains hymns translated from English and German languages, as well as indigenous hymns. However, one of the most beloved hymns of the Mennonites and Ukrainian Shtundists was the Orthodox liturgical chanting "Primi hvalu blagodaren'e, Syn Bozhiy za Tvoyu liubov'" (Accept praise and thanksgiving, Son of God, for Your love).²⁶¹ In fact, acceptance of Orthodox music varied. Some people, as they moved away from Orthodoxy, refused to sing such songs, whereas others continued to chant Orthodox texts

²⁵⁶ Pekun, "Luka Nikolaevich Dzekuts-Maley: zhizn' i sluzhenie," p. 9.

²⁵⁷ A.I.K., "Evangel'skaya pesn'" [Evangelic Song], *Utrennyaa Zvezda* [The Morning Star], no. 3-5 (1922): 15.

²⁵⁸ Balikhin, "Moya poezdka zagranitsu," p. 15.

²⁵⁹ Mikhail Timoshenko, "Baptisty i ikh protivniki" [Baptists and Their Adversaries], *Baptist*, no. 9 (1911): 69.

²⁶⁰ Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost'*, p. 240. The book by William H. Brackney, ed., *Baptist Life and Thought, A Source Book*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1998) is a valuable resource on the development and identity of Baptists.

²⁶¹ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 140.

and music until they developed their own songs.²⁶²

The Molokan tradition²⁶³ exerted strong influence over the worship in the Tiflis Baptist community, Transcaucasia, where hymns were borrowed from the German Baptist collection *Glaubenstimme* as another source for the singing repertoire of the community. People often composed or selected tunes which were similar in character to Russian folk songs. Such hymns as “Liubit Ish Khristos bezmerno (Only Christ Loves without Any Measure), “Ya nashel sebe spasen'ie” (I Have Found My Salvation)²⁶⁴ and others were composed in Tiflis.²⁶⁵ Molokan singing, however, “could not satisfy the evangelicals because it was not in tune with their spirit. The Evangelical Baptist movement did not need plaintive singing, but singing which was cheerful and joyful.”²⁶⁶

The development of sung worship took another direction in St. Petersburg. Many representatives of the upper class who were fluent in foreign languages began to translate Christian books and hymns into Russian.²⁶⁷ The favorite songs of the Evangelicals in St. Petersburg were “Radost', radost' neprestanno” (Joyous, Joyous, Without Ceasing), and “V chas kogda truba Gospodnia” (When the Trumpet of the Lord), as well as “Bog s toboi dokole svidimsia” (God Be With You 'til We Meet Again),²⁶⁸ translated from English by Alexandra

²⁶² L.I. Kharlov, “Iz istorii muzikal'no-pevcheskogo sluzheniya nashego bratstva” [From the History of Music and Singing Ministry of Our Brotherhood], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 6 (1981): 46.

²⁶³ The term “molokan” was used for the first time in 1785 in relation to a religious group in Tambov governorate, because they were drinking milk (“moloko” in Russian) during lent time. In their turn the group offered a different explanation of this term referring to the words of the apostle Peter, who called people to “long for the pure milk of the word” (1 Peter 2:2). There are other versions of the origins of the term. Semen Uklein became a founder of the molokan movement. The movement spread from Tambov province to Saratov, Voronezh, Astrakhan, Kursk and other provinces. The molokans subscribed to a spiritual interpretation of baptism, Eucharist, and resurrection, and stood against serfdom and military service. Molokan public worship consisted of Bible reading and singing hymns. In the 19th century the molokan movement was divided into many branches, including “water molokans,” who stated that baptism and the Lord’s Supper were essential. N.I. Voronin (see footnote 405) was interested in their doctrine. Molokans survived severe persecution in Russia in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Presently there are a few small groups remaining in Transcaucasia, Ukraine, and the Tambov region in Russia, as well as in the US, Argentina, Canada and other countries and regions. See *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, pp. 30-32, 42-43; L.N. Mitrokhin, ed., *Khristianstvo. Slovar'* [Christianity. Dictionary] (Moskva: “Respublika,” 1994), pp. 287-288; A.S. Chernov, “Fenomen Rossiyskoy kontrkultury na primere natsional'nogo samosoznaniya dukhovnykh khristian-molokan” [Phenomenon of Russian Counter Culture of the Example of National Selfconsciousness of Spiritual Christians-Molokans], *Vestnik TGU* [TGU Herald], no. 9 (89) (2010): 229-233; A.S. Chernov, “Inoskazaniye kak kharakternaya osobennost' ucheniya dukhovnykh khristian-molokan” [Circumlocution as Feature of Study of Spiritual Christians-Molokans], *Vestnik TGU* [TGU Herald], no 6 (110) (2012): 282-288; Roman Lunkin and Anton Prokof'yev, “Molokans and Dukhobors: Living Sources of Russian Protestantism,” *Religion, State & Society*, vol. 28, no. 1 (March 2000): 85-90.

²⁶⁴ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, nos. 100, 189. “Only Christ Loves without Any Measure” was originally written as “One There Is, Above All Others.”

²⁶⁵ Kharlov, “Iz istorii muzikal'no-pevcheskogo sluzheniya nashego bratstva,” p. 47.

²⁶⁶ A.S. Belousov, “Gospod' sila moya i pesn'” [God is My Strength and My Song], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 2 (1966): 76. T.S. Rudnichenko, “Pesnopeniya v religioznykh ritualakh dukhoborov i molokan Rostovskoy oblasti: sovremennoye sostoyaniye” [Chants in Religious Rituals of the Doukhobors and Molokans in the Rostov Region: Current State], *Vestnik TGU* [TGU Herald], no. 4 (168) (2015): 173-179.

²⁶⁷ Liven, *Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie v Rossii*, p. 28.

²⁶⁸ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, nos. 176, 665, 686. Y.S. Goncharenko, “Izdanie sbornikov dukhovnykh pesen v kontekste razvitiya dukhovnoi muzyki evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov Rossii” [The Publication of Collections of Spiritual Songs in the Context of Development of Spiritual Music of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Russia], in

Peyker. Such translated hymns became very popular and were included in one of the most popular collections, *Husly*, along with works by local authors.²⁶⁹ Thus, these various groups of evangelical believers experienced the influence of different singing traditions: Orthodox, Molokan and Western-evangelical. The above-mentioned songs are still widely used in traditional worship in ECB Churches in Belarus.

3.3. Western forms in the eastern context: problems of adaptation

3.3.1. Local context against “imported faith”²⁷⁰

The inculturation of western ideas and symbols into an eastern context was not a simple matter. Moreover, the Tsarist state and the Orthodox society strongly opposed “foreign faith” in an attempt to preserve a monodenominational Russian state, cherished for many centuries. The mere idea that Russian speakers might convert from Orthodoxy to Baptism was regarded as a threat to the statehood and the idea of freedom of choice in religion was generally alien to the traditional Russian mind.

One aspect of this conflict of worldviews was described by Alexander Milovidov, an Eastern Orthodox who researched the first Baptist groups and churches in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He stated his opinion that “a Belarusian is alien to philosophical and rationalistic inclinations of Baptists, which requires more abstract thinking, reasoning and generalizations than modern, common Belarusian people possess.”²⁷¹ “In addition,” he continues, “Belarusians are noted for their extreme suspicion of people, especially if these are preachers of some new religious doctrine, which can be explained by painful historical circumstances.”²⁷² Consequently, Milovidov concludes, Baptist beliefs and practices cannot be successful among Belarusians. His view is in unison with Ivan Sokolov’s description of situation in sixteenth and seventeenth century Russia. The latter argued that for a vast majority of Russians “Christianity focused almost exclusively on Byzantine rituals, complicated symbolism and magnificent religious rites. It is not surprising that all Protestant teaching beginning from

140 let rossiiskomu baptism. Proshloe, nastoyashchee, perspektivy [140 anniversary of Russian Baptists. Past, Present and Prospects] (October, 19–20, 2007), conference papers. “When the Trumpet of the Lord” was originally written as “When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder.”

²⁶⁹ Coleman, *Russian Baptists & Spiritual Revolution 1905-1929*, p. 98.

²⁷⁰ Heather J. Coleman, “Baptist Beginnings in Russia and Ukraine,” *Baptist History and Heritage*, no. 1, vol. XLII (Winter, 2007): 31.

²⁷¹ Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundobaptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae*, p. 20. It should be noted that even though Milovidov’s work was based on wide-ranging research, the author’s conclusions indicate his strong interest in defending the Orthodox faith. V.N. Linkevich, “Novyye techeniya protestantizma v Belorussii vo II pol. XIX – nach. XX vv.” [New Movements of Protestantism in Belarus in the Second Half of the 19th – Beginning of the 20th Centuries] *Novaya ekonomika* [New Economy], no. 1 (67) (2016): 198.

²⁷² Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundobaptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae*, pp. 19-20.

doctrines to rituals seemed unclear, something strange and even deprived of religious character.”²⁷³

The analysis of the influence of mindset within the historical perspective is complicated by the additional factor of persecution. Results might have been different if there had not been persecution and suppression against evangelical movements throughout the empire. Apostasy from the Orthodox faith was punished as a crime until 1905,²⁷⁴ although members of other denominations and religions were permitted and encouraged to convert to Orthodoxy without restriction.²⁷⁵ However, although under harsh conditions, as a result of the exile and resettlement of believers, communities began to emerge in Siberia and Central Asia.²⁷⁶ Therefore, an evaluation of many conversions to evangelical Christianity indicates that they included an expression of protest against the political and religious oppression of the former regime.²⁷⁷

Thus, it can be seen that active opposition from the state, from the State church, from fellow-villagers and even from closest relatives by no means prevented conversions to evangelical Christianity.²⁷⁸ On the contrary, it contributed to a distinct expression of the indigenous culture which was conveyed, for example, in the minor key of many worship tunes. As Pavel Vasil’evich Pavlov, one of the leaders of the Baptist Union (and son of Vasilii Gur’evich Pavlov²⁷⁹), claimed, an exotic plant from overseas would not have survived on Russian soil.²⁸⁰ Instead, the Russian-Ukrainian-Belarusian evangelical community, starting with individual communities in the first fifty years of its existence (1867-1917), and having survived two periods of severe persecution (in the 1890s and in the 1920s and 1930s) both of which aimed at ending the evangelisation of the Russian people, grew by more than two hundred thousand members.

3.3.2. *Western Christianity on eastern soil*

Further growth of the evangelical movement in Belarus demonstrates the flexibility of Baptists, adapting forms and content in order to implement Baptist beliefs and practices within

²⁷³ Ivan Sokolov, *Otnoshenie protestantizma k Rossii v XVI i XVII vekakh* [The Relation of Protestantism to Russian in the 16-17th centuries] (Moskva: Tipographia E. Lissner and Y. Roman, 1880), p. 42.

²⁷⁴ On 4 March 1905 the edict of toleration of Nicholas II was published as the “Decree on Toleration.”

²⁷⁵ *Svod zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii* [Code of Laws of the Russian Empire], vol 14, part 1 (St. Petersburg, 1982), pp. 424, 507.

²⁷⁶ *Istoriya evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, pp. 125-126.

²⁷⁷ P.V. Pavlov, “Doklad na 3-m Vsemirnom kongresse baptistov v Stockgolme, Shvetsiya, 26.07.1923” [Report on the 3rd World Congress of Baptists in Stockholm, Sweden, 26.07.1923,” in Kovalenko, *Oblako svidetelei Khristovyykh*: 219.

²⁷⁸ Such a situation is in no way comparable to the deliberate transfer of the Byzantine model of Christianity to the Russian territory many centuries ago. See Konstantin Prokhorov, *Mezhdue Zapadom i Vostokom: Zametki o nachale evangel’skogo dvizheniya v Rossii* [Between East and West: Notes on early evangelical movement in Russia], *Bogoslovskie razmyshleniya* [Theological Reflections], no. 13 (2012): 55, 65.

²⁷⁹ For Vasilii Gur’evich Pavlov, see footnote 227.

²⁸⁰ Pavlov, “Doklad na 3-m Vsemirnom kongresse baptistov v Stockgolme, Shvetsiya,” p. 219.

their own culture and to create distinct Belarusian/Russian churches. As has already been shown the Evangelical movement grew on traditional Slavic Orthodox cultural soil. In fact, it is difficult to distinguish between culture, national character and Orthodoxy, as religion determines culture specifics and culture in turn adapts religion to its traditions. Perhaps the cultural type was a creation of the Orthodox world-view²⁸¹ and the Orthodox faith can be considered as a system-forming basis of Russian culture.²⁸² One cannot be definitive of either strictly national or foreign roots of Baptists in Belarus/Russia on the basis of rituals or doctrines. Dostoevsky once described this new phenomenon as “German Protestantism in an environment of Orthodoxy.”²⁸³ In 1919, S.V. Mel’gunov offered a contestable claim that “Baptists are about the same as Orthodox but in a slightly distorted form.”²⁸⁴ A modern Russian Pentecostal scholar Tatyana Nikol’skaya, along with others, uses the term “Russian Protestantism.”²⁸⁵

Eastern, or ‘Russian’, Protestantism was enriched by elements of both western and eastern culture, synthesizing rational and emotional, Orthodox quietism and Protestant activity, attention to worship and the evangelical emphasis on ethics. Thus, Russian-speaking evangelical Christians possess their own specifics. Mitrokhin asserts that this came about

due to novelty and historical unexpectedness of the combinations, when familiar ideas, subjects, symbols and combinations were interrelated under different historical circumstances, gaining a different meaning. . . . As a result of complicated system of ties an ‘alien’ culture is adopted according to the standards of the domestic one and the emerging hybrids gain viability of [a] self-developing organism.²⁸⁶

Evangelical leaders were evidently aware of the problem of adaptation. They wondered how a revival with an English character in St. Petersburg could become a Russian revival in the Russian environment. Or how could a Baptist movement of Oncken’s pattern become

²⁸¹ Tamara Matyash, “Pravoslavie kak kul’turny fenomen” [Orthodoxy as a Cultural Phenomenon], in *Russkaya pravoslavnaya tserkov’ v prostranstve Evrasii. Materialy XIV Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora* [Russian Orthodox Church in Eurasia. Materials of the VI World Russian People’s Council] (Moskva: “Eurasia,” 2002): 107.

²⁸² Victor Vereshchagin, “O samobytnosti russkoi kul’tury v kontekste globalizatsii” [On the uniqueness of Russian culture in the context of globalization], in *Russkaya pravoslavnaya tserkov’ v prostranstve Evrasii*, pp. 122.

²⁸³ F.M. Dostoevsky, *Dnevnik Pisatelya, 1873* [Writer’s Diary, 1873], Collected works in 15 vols., vol. 12 (Saint-Peterburg: “Nauka,” 1992), p. 69.

²⁸⁴ S.P. Mel’gunov, *Iz istorii religiozno-obshchestvennykh dvizhenii v Rossii XIX v.* [From the History of Religious and Social Movements in Russia in the XIX Century] (Moskva: Zadruga, 1919), p. 236.

²⁸⁵ Tatyana Nikol’skaya, “Russian Protestantism at the Stage of Legalization: 1905-1917,” *Bogoslovskie razmyshleniya* [Theological Reflections], no. 4 (2004): 182.

²⁸⁶ Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost’*, pp. 240, 191. Undoubtedly, not all forms and features of Baptists in Europe and the West could sprout in Belarusian soil. For example, Nikol’skaya notes that “after all, we have unrealized or underdeveloped features of western Protestantism, such as Protestant business ethics (clearly expressed among Old Believers, by the way), the cult of entrepreneurship, personal and professional success, the desire for social integration, and willingness and ability to influence society.” (“Uroki istorii dlya EKhB” [History Lessons for ECB], *Mirt* [Myrtle], no. 2 (57) (2007), p. 10.) Nevertheless, Nikol’skaya cites some examples from state archives which show how “sectarians” distinguished themselves from the majority of the Orthodox population in terms of productivity in business, trade, and crafts, because of their diligence in work, reliability, rejection of smoking and drinking. Tatyana Nikol’skaya, “Russkiy Protestantizm na etape utverzhdeniya legalizatsii (1905-1917)” [Russian Protestantism During the Approval of Legalization (1905-1917)], *Bogoslovskie razmyshleniya* [Theological Reflections], no. 4 (2004): 176.

Russian?²⁸⁷ Such questions included doctrinal and social issues in addition to patterns of worship. Prokhanov described the evangelical movement as a National reformist movement and argued that the evangelical church was equivalent to the restored early Christian church in its teaching.²⁸⁸

Just as Prokhanov addressed wider societal and cultural issues alongside the biblical and spiritual, Dzekuts-Maley's work encompassed a variety of aspects such as the cultural, linguistic and educational. For example, he helped found the cultural society "Belaruskaya hatka", he translated the New Testament to the Belarusian language, educationally, his fellow-workers did not only teach about Christianity but also taught general subjects, and in terms of the social, he organized shelters and nursing homes.²⁸⁹ In this manner he wanted to introduce the Gospel into the everyday lives of people and promote Baptist faith and practices which might become a "national" religion in Belarus.

The lower classes appeared to approve of this approach. Kahle notes that it was the masses, not the ruling circles, who defined the strategy. He stressed that "the construction was going and is going in a natural way from the bottom, from among the people, the same way as the church was built in the days of Christ and the Apostles."²⁹⁰ Heather Coleman argues similarly that

as they sought to establish a network of congregations and develop music and liturgies to celebrate their faith, Russian evangelicals repeatedly confronted the problem of establishing a native Russian version of an imported Baptist faith.

. . . Russian evangelicals expressed pride in belonging to an international communion and tended to be quite candid about the part that non-Russians had played in the evolution of their church. They insisted, however, that this role was primarily catalytic.²⁹¹

Thus, at the Fourth World Baptist Congress in 1928, a leader of the Baptist movement in Belarus reported that "from the outset, the ministry of Baptists in our country is in the hands of the local people of Russia. Baptist missionaries did not minister in Russia. But throughout our history we have had persistently upheld the purity of Baptist principles in regard to ministry of visiting missionaries of other faiths from overseas."²⁹²

However, contextualization required time and effort. It had taken several decades until Eastern Slavic Protestantism learned to write indigenous hymns while, at the same time, the

²⁸⁷ Kahle, *Evangel'skie Khristiane v Rossii i Sovetskom Soyuze*, p. 425.

²⁸⁸ Mitskevich, *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov*, p. 214.

²⁸⁹ Stanislav Akinchyts, "...Kab dlya nashaga naroda byla vydadzena Svyataya kniga" [...So that the Holy Book Would be Given to Our People], *Krynitsa Zhyttsya*, no. 6 (2008): 14-16.

²⁹⁰ Kahle, *Evangel'skie khristiane v Rossii i Sovetskom Soyuze*, p. 487.

²⁹¹ Coleman, "Baptist Beginnings in Russia and Ukraine," pp. 31-32.

²⁹² *Doklad P.V. Ivanova-Klyshnikova na 4-m Vsemirnom Kongresse Baptistov 25 iyunya 1928 g. Toronto, Canada* [P.V. Ivanov-Klyshnikov Report on the 4th World Baptist Congress, June, 25, 1928, Toronto, Canada], in Kovalenko, *Oblako svidetelei Khristovyykh*, p. 298.

influence of western singing literature diminished.²⁹³ It is important to note that while evangelicals emphasized independence and originality, they did not reject the experience and help from western believers whose way of thinking about worship could become a model for many churches.²⁹⁴ But the process of adoption of western ideas was not always smooth, and it was accompanied both by failures and success. In this regard, it is interesting to note how the borrowing of western hymns by Russian-speaking churches was assessed in different Slavic evangelical contexts. Princess Sophia Liven, an active member of the Evangelical Christian church, addressed the pattern of some educated representatives of the higher class in St. Petersburg translating hymns into Russian. She believed that “the new living church was in need of spiritual hymns . . . but as for the tunes - they were primitive in regard to music, and were somewhat alien to the Russian ear, as they were an exact repetition of the English ones.”²⁹⁵

On the other hand, the initiator of the Russian Baptist work in Transcaucasia, Martin Kalweit (himself a German from Memel, East Prussia) explained that because both Russians and Germans were in the congregation, “we use both languages in our service and sing hymns from a Russian collection as well as from the *Glaubenstimme*. Some of the hymns are the same and suit the same tune, but the German are the favorites even with those who understand Russian best, as the words are simpler and the tunes more lively.”²⁹⁶

In church planting practice such interaction often leads to conflicts. Coleman reports a typical example:

Foreigners or Russian Germans had provided language and forms that systematized already existing ideas and aspirations. Nevertheless the memoirs and personal correspondence of early leaders reveal the practical and intellectual difficulties of reconciling borrowed structures with popular native aspirations. For example, the influential Baptist missionary and later pastor of Baku, Vasilii Ivanov, described the tension between Russians and Germans over liturgical practices in his unpublished recollections of the early days of the Tiflis congregation. Although the faith was the same, he explained, “the nation and habits were different.” “The Russian Baptists,” he elaborated, “wanted to hold to many Molokan ways and performing bows during singing and prayers and so on.” The Germans, by contrast, “wanted to toss out everything Russian and Molokan from the service and set up everything in the German manner.”²⁹⁷

In 1913-1914, shortly before his death, Vasilii Vasil’evich Ivanov, pastor of the church in Baku,²⁹⁸ became the chief editor of *Baptist* magazine.²⁹⁹ In his articles, which were critical of

²⁹³ Kahle, *Evangel'skie khristiane v Rossii i Sovetskom Soyuze*, p. 425.

²⁹⁴ Yet, to be fair, there was always a demand for such development. Observations reveal that some new religious churches in Belarus, Russia and the Ukraine that have been planted by, or in close cooperation with, western and Korean missionaries in the late 20th – early 21st century, in their formation period are full of people who have grown up in a post-*perestroika* cosmopolitan environment. These churches do not hesitate to imitate the order established by the founding missionary or replicate aspects of western forms and content. Examples of the above would include such congregations as “Light of Christ,” “New Earth,” and “Light of Hope” in Minsk. The first of these was strongly influenced by Korean missionaries and the others by western churches and missionaries.

²⁹⁵ Liven, *Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie v Rossii*, p. 16.

²⁹⁶ Randall, *Communities of Conviction. Baptist Beginning in Europe*, p. 88.

²⁹⁷ Coleman, *Russian Baptists & Spiritual Revolution 1905-1929*, p. 96.

²⁹⁸ E. Sokolov, “V.V. Ivanov,” *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 1 (1982): 47-52.

western Christian culture, he opined that Russian Baptists were carried away by numerous translations of “foreign articles and light stories.”³⁰⁰ He also disapproved of the growing practice of singing by a church choir, while he nostalgically remembered the “common” (probably Molokan) singing by the entire congregation. He critically contrasted one against the other, comparing communal singing to, amongst other things, the first joyful sunbeams against a lifeless electric light.³⁰¹

Baptist identity and the practice of worship continued to evolve during the Soviet period in mutual interaction with the evangelical faith patterns within the AUCECB.³⁰² Conflicts were natural consequences of the work of continuing contextualization, and they manifested themselves both in relation to the western traditions as well as in disputes within the eastern tradition. This tension remains in ECB churches even today, revealing itself in different perceptions of freedom and order in the service (should one need a preaching/sermon schedule, for example?), in the clash of analytical or rationalistic understandings and intuitive comprehension of the truth (should pastors prepare their sermons or is it sufficient to pray and trust the “provision” of the Spirit to guide his words?), as well as in a combination of sacramental and symbolic approaches to “religious rites” (different conceptions of what is happening at Eucharist).³⁰³

The issue of contextualization became fresh again after the fall of the Iron Curtain when western forms and practices were reintroduced to Russian-speaking churches. The links between various western churches and ECB churches in Belarus encounter similar tensions. Many Baptist believers would express their discomfort with new forms of praying, such as being seated rather than standing or kneeling, as has been the custom, or being asked to pray in small groups of people rather than as a whole congregation. Some believers are offended by humor in a sermon,³⁰⁴ by laughter and applause in the house of prayer, and by the lack of respect to the Bible as a book.³⁰⁵

Thus, the analysis of the origin and formation of worship, of international relations, and

²⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 50.

³⁰⁰ V. Ivanov, “Obshchiny i presviteriy” [Communities and Pastors], *Baptist*, no. 21-24 (1914), p. 8.

³⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 21-22.

³⁰² Pilli, “Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Estonia: The Shaping of Identity, 1945-1991,” p. 253.

³⁰³ Concerning tensions in worship see Ellis, “Gathering Struggles: Creative Tensions in Baptist Worship.” Detailed discussion of this topic is the subject of Chapters 7 and 8.

³⁰⁴ Almost all popular books in homiletics that are available in Russian are western translations, with humor and jokes perceived as a natural part of a sermon. Nevertheless, using humor can cause discomfort in a traditional church. To give a personal example, in my sermon in “Light of Gospel” church on 7 November 2012 I used a few funny illustrations. A brother from an unregistered Minsk church approached me afterwards and complained that these illustrations precluded him from grasping the sermon completely.

³⁰⁵ In the early 1990s, when guests from Western Europe and USA flooded Belarusian churches, the local Christians were appalled by cases of the Bible being treated “improperly.” For example, guests putting it on the floor, or casually holding an open Bible with one hand by its corner. Having that in mind, a western organization reminded its professors that the Christians in Eastern Europe and Central Asia take worship and the Scripture very seriously, so they should treat the Word and the printed Bible with great respect.

observation of its practice today demonstrates how form, content and the spirit of worship services in Belarusian ECB churches reveal both western influence and local roots and how context has contributed to an original form of worship. The Evangelicals who spread in Belarus and throughout the Russian Empire quickly gained particular distinctives compared to their western European and North American counterparts. The historical, political, and socio-economic framework of Tsarist Russia and then of Soviet Union and Poland, alongside ties to religious and Christian movements in Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have had a lasting impact, and thus help explain the uniqueness of the evangelical movement in Belarus and the Russian-speaking context as a whole. But in addition to the historical roots and the clash of Western and Eastern traditions influencing the process of the formation of worship, other factors have influenced the content and character of worship, such as theological foundations, the dominance of the Orthodox Church, and persecution and seclusion in Tsarist Russia and later in the Soviet period. It is to a careful examination of these particular aspects that Chapter Four now turns.

CHAPTER 4. CONTEXT OF FORMATION

4.1. Theological grounds

4.1.1. *Back to the early church*³⁰⁶

Aside from the extremely significant themes of the religious (namely orthodox) environment and the socio-political context that have impacted the culture, spirit and forms of Belarusian worship, this thesis contends that the logic of the development of Belarusian evangelical and Baptist worship cannot be properly understood without examination of a distinct theological motivation.³⁰⁷ The essence of this particular theological-ideological basis can perhaps be encapsulated by the following claim: over time Christians have deviated from the pure teaching of the Gospel; a clear and simple doctrine of salvation gradually became buried under the load of traditions and rituals; the church now needs to get rid of later developments and return to the origins, to New Testament Christianity, and build life and worship according to the Gospel rather than tradition.

An author of one of the articles in *Bratskiy Vestnik* explains it thus:

The evangelical Baptist movement which demands a return to original Christianity appeared in Western Europe in the sixteenth century. This movement cancelled the division of Christians into priests and laymen, for all true Christians are priests of the Most High God, and pastoral ministry is only one of many ways to serve God. This movement rejected infant baptism because baptism is a promise of good conscience to God, and only a conscious person is able to give this kind of promise. The Evangelical-Baptist movement declared cancellation of all dubious oral church tradition which contradicts the Scripture, for our doctrine should be based on the Holy Scripture only. The Evangelical-Baptist movement declared that only spiritually regenerated people who gave their hearts to Christ were eligible to be members of a Christian congregation. This movement called for thorough study of Scripture, cancellation of pompous ritual, and worshipping only God, and Christ only.³⁰⁸

A particular characteristic of the movement was an emphasis on familiarity with the Bible. Reading Scriptures in plain language, or listening to preaching of the new faith, resulted in the first conversions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As some seeker Belarusians noticed the discrepancy between the teachings of Christ and the apostles as they understood them, as they started to question various liturgical practices such as worshipping saints, worshipping icons, baptizing infants, and, most importantly, as they recognized their own immoral behavior such as drinking, stealing, fraud, and so on, they began to desire to live and worship “according to the Scriptures.”

³⁰⁶ By “the Early church” I mean the church as described in the New Testament, limited by the lifetime of the apostles.

³⁰⁷ On the importance of theological notions see Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, pp. 44-45.

³⁰⁸ Belousov, “Gospod’ sila moya i pesn’,” p. 76

The motif to return to the teaching and practice of the New Testament church is especially clear in songs and poems by Prokhanov, which were extremely popular among evangelicals in Belarus.

We call the whole world
To come to the light of early Christianity.
May centuries-old additions
Fall off and are destroyed in churches.
May the Church of the New Days rise
In the garments of a new revival.³⁰⁹

A title of another song by the same author repeats the collection title, “Songs of Early Christians.” Prokhanov speaks about the life of the early church as an example for the generation to come and asks the Lord to reproduce the church of early Christians.³¹⁰ Furthermore in his poem entitled “Return!” he calls “Back to Christ and the covenant made at Calvary, Back to the earliest age of Christianity” and “Away from the worship of inanimate objects.”³¹¹ Other Russian-speaking preachers and theologians also argued that the Evangelical brotherhood followed the “apostolic order” and “the path of Christians of the apostolic age.”³¹² The term “New Testament church” was adopted to describe this movement.³¹³

In regard to ecclesiology, such restoration was expressed primarily in the denial of the division of believers into clergy and laity. As elucidated in *Bratskiy Vestnik*, Evangelical-Baptist communities restored the principle of the early Christian church where communities “were not divided into the clergy and parishioners.”³¹⁴ To emphasize equality, the word “brotherhood”³¹⁵

³⁰⁹ I.S. Prokhanov and Y.I. Zhidkov, eds., *Pesni pervykh khristian* [The Songs of the First Christians] (Leningrad: Vsesoyuznyy sovet evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov, 1927), no. 6a, refrain and fourth stanza.

³¹⁰ Ibid., no. 3.

³¹¹ Ibid., no. 4. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the next song in this collection is called “Forward to the Triumph!” so as not to create a one-sided view of evangelical Christianity. “Go on from the principles of the Doctrine of Christ, from the letters of deadening rituals! Go on to excellence in the knowledge of the Word and in the holiness of actions and views.” (*Pesni pervykh khristian*, no. 5, second stanza.)

³¹² K.V. Somov, “Tserkov' Khrista i ee sviashchenstvo” [The Church of Christ and Its Priesthood], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 4 (1963): 53.

³¹³ A.V. Karev, “Svyashchennodeistviya tserkvi” [Sacred Rites of the Church], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 1 (1963): 36. British Baptist theologian, Paul S. Fiddes, similarly points to the interpretation of Baptist identity by an American Baptist theologian, James Wm. McClendon, commenting that in McClendon’s view “the Baptist vision to be nothing other than a shared awareness that the present Christian community *is* the early Christian community and *is* the eschatological community. Baptists understand themselves... as living *immediately in* the scriptural story and in the story of the day of judgment, and it is this that shapes their convictions and their ethics.” (Paul S. Fiddes, “Theology and a Baptist Way of Community,” in *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way* ed. Paul S. Fiddes, Brian Haymes, Richard L. Kidd, Michael Quicke, (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 2000): 26. See James Wm. McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 30, where he states, “Rather, say that Scripture in this vision effects a link between the church of the apostles and our own. So the vision can be expressed as a hermeneutical principle: *shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community*. In a motto, **the church now is the primitive church and the church on judgment day**; the obedience and liberty of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth is *our* liberty, *our* obedience, till time's end.” (Emphasis in original) Thus, it can be argued that the return to first-church experience is very much in the 'DNA' for Baptist believers in general, and not only a Russian-Belarusian experience.

³¹⁴ Somov, “Tserkov' Khrista i ee sviashchenstvo,” p. 62.

³¹⁵ The word “brotherhood” is often used as a synonym of the term “union” (e.g., Belarusian brotherhood, or

was and still is used in the name of the association of churches. Regarding the clergy, in 1923 Pavel Pavlov, a prominent figure of the evangelical Baptist movement, emphasized that

Our movement is growing and expanding because the spirit of the apostolic Church is alive in us, and the lack of financial support is supplemented by enthusiasm. We have almost no professional preachers who receive regular salaries. Our workers, following the example of Apostle Paul, in most cases earn their bread with their own hands, and preach the gospel.³¹⁶

Encouraging large numbers of male believers to get involved in preaching was one of the aspects of the development of the “brotherhood” idea.³¹⁷ A contemporary historian of the evangelical Baptist movement in Russia puts it in the following way:

[A] democratic approach to the ministry of the word, that could be traced back to the New Testament and inherited by evangelical Christian Baptists in Russia from their forefathers, brings an essential component of creative diversity into public worship, thus creating good atmosphere for the development of the ministry of the word and allowing the missionary spirit to take hold of all the congregation.³¹⁸

“Brotherhood of independent churches and missions of in Ukraine” in the official name of the union) or for a group of churches on a certain territory (“Russian-speaking brotherhood”) or that are related by certain characteristics (“evangelical brotherhood,” “brotherhood of the Council of Churches”). Nowadays the term is used less and less, especially as the majority, sometimes absolute majority, of the congregation is composed of women (see footnote 955).

³¹⁶ Pavlov, “Doklad na 3-m Vsemirnomo kongresse baptistov v Stockgolme, Shvetsiya, 26.07.1923,” p. 220. The absence of “professional” pastors and missionaries in Belarusian and other Eastern Slavic churches lasted almost to the end of the twentieth century when, due primarily to the support and influence of western believers, “professional” missionaries and pastors appeared, being justified “on the basis of the Gospel” prescribing “not to muzzle the ox while he is treading” (1 Tim. 5:18). The recent economic crisis, however, coupled with reduced financial support from western churches at the turn the twenty-first century, has again forced many servants to earn their bread with their own hands.

³¹⁷ In the article “About Women’s Ministry in Church” the editors of *Bratskiy Vestnik* magazine, on the basis of 1 Cor. 11:5, Phil. 4:2-3, Acts 2:17 and 7:1-6, and Luke 2:38, state that women could minister by preaching the Gospel alongside their involvement in charity, singing and deaconry. (*Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 3 (1945), pp. 47-49; also no. 1 (1948), p. 7.) See quotation and footnote 328. Such a tradition also existed among Pashkov’s followers (Margaritov, *Istoriya russkikh misticheskikh i racionalisticheskikh sekt*, p. 166). However, references to women preaching are very rare. In his section on “*Bratskiy Vestnik* on preaching” Cheprasov notes “that despite the previously noted ‘official position’ of the Baptist Union and the BV [*Bratskiy Vestnik*] on women in preaching, its subsequent publications always referred to preachers using the masculine pronoun ‘he.’ Similarly, women-preachers never appeared on its pages as examples for others (unlike male preachers, such as Prokhanov, Kargel and many others).” (Cheprasov, “Formative? Informative? Neither? Towards understanding of the practice of proclamation, the core element of Russian Baptist Worship,” ch. 4.2.) The involvement of women in preaching activity after the war could be explained by the lack of brothers or their absence altogether. There has not been a single occasion from the early 1990s up to the present time when I have encountered sisters preaching from the pulpit during regular Sunday worship during my church visits in Belarus, even though witnesses confirmed such cases. For example, according to Pavel Osenenko, in 1986 two sisters preached in Mogilev church on Saturday, March 8 (International Women’s Day). The third sermon in conclusion was preached by a church pastor. (The testimony of Pavel Osenenko, Personal interview with author, 7 March 2017, Minsk [Personal notes, p. 53].)

Women are not ordained for pastoral ministry in Baptist churches in Belarus either (let us note that preaching and ordination are not linked directly. Both ordained and non-ordained brothers can preach in churches). The other denominations in Belarus stick to the same practice with regard to women preaching and being ordained. This includes the Russian Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic, and Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostal). Russian-speaking Baptist Unions of Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Central Asia do not ordain women either. Only men have a right to preach with some rare exceptions. So far the status quo has not raised significant issues and discussions in church and society. Regarding the religious and social context of church ministry no important changes in this area can be foreseen in the near future.

³¹⁸ V.A. Popov, “Otechestvennaya shkola propovedi v tserkvakh evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov” [National School of preaching in Evangelical Christians-Baptists churches], in *Traditsiya podgotovki sluzhiteley v bratstve evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov. Istoriya i perspektivy: Sbornik statey* [Tradition of Training Ministers in the

On the grounds of overthrowing “ancient accretions,” Baptists rejected anointing,³¹⁹ compulsory confession, making the sign of the cross, prescribed fasting, and infant baptism, following the model of Christ and also the Ethiopian eunuch.³²⁰ Believers’ baptism and adult membership were given particular attention. Martsinkovskiy, a Christian publisher, preacher and the leader of the Russian movement of Christian students, who was deported from the Soviet Union in 1923, insisted that new birth should precede baptism. “At that time the Orthodox Historic Church puts baptism first, and then revival, preaching baptism as the source of revival. The Free Church puts revival before baptism, seeing that this is required by the Word of God and that this is justified by real life.”³²¹ Baptist minister Konstantin Somov in *Bratskiy Vestnik* later confirmed the commitment to this practice: “The communities adopted people who consciously believed in Christ and gave Him their hearts.”³²²

The perception was that it was necessary for public worship to be primarily founded on New Testament principles which included components of early church worship. Acts 2:42, for example, reports that the reading of the Word of God plus instruction and teaching composed the basis for the worship services of Christian communities in the apostolic age; these therefore should be a central part of our worship services.³²³ Great attention to preaching, teaching, singing, and prayer is given with reference to Matthew 21:13, Acts 1:14, 2:42, 4:24-31, and 12:12, to 1 Corinthians 14:26, Ephesians 5:19, and Colossians 3:16. Former AUCECB Chairman Jacov Zhidkov described an ideal worship time thus:

Under guidance of their beloved brother pastor some able brothers and sisters took part in sharing the Good News. They read the Holy Scripture, explained the passage and applied it to Christian life. Some others glorified the Lord with singing. And some offered up their petitions and praise to the Lord in brief and clear words. So it happened as the Apostle Paul teaches in his Epistle to Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”³²⁴

Brotherhood of Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches. History and Perspective. Collection of Articles] (Moskva: Rossiisky soyuz evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov, 2013): 44. In terms of making pastoral ministry more professional, nowadays big churches tend to prefer quality to quantity by limiting access to the pulpit. This change is not perceived as a deviation from the New Testament practice, but tends to be based on the passages about gifts and various church ministries, such as 1 Cor. 12-13; Eph. 4:11-16.

³¹⁹ In the Orthodox tradition, a priest anoints and crosses the human body with scented oil, the chrism, which through divine grace is transmitted and the Holy Ghost descends.

³²⁰ Matt. 3:13-17; Acts 8:36-39. The theology of returning to apostolic origins plays an even more important role in the radical rejection of any practice which “does not follow Scripture.” In fact, this negative aspect of elimination of accumulated “layers,” was at the forefront of the return to “the basics.”

³²¹ Martsinkovskiy, *Zapisky veruyushego*, p. 191.

³²² Somov, “Tserkov' Khrista i ee sviashchenstvo,” p. 62.

³²³ I. Motorin, “O bogoslužhenii v dni apostolov i v nashi dni” [On Worship in the Days of the Apostles and Today], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 1 (1957): 7-10, p. 8. Q, 2008. This perception was confirmed in the course of the questionnaires and was specifically addressed in questions A3 and A4.

³²⁴ “Vzglyad nazad” [A Look Back], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 1 (1948): 5-11, p. 7.

Some scenes from the life of Christ have also become models for imitation. An example of this would be the current practice in some, especially smaller churches, of greeting at the entrance to the hall where those entering after silent prayer welcome others with the words “Peace be with you.” The response is: “With peace.” This practice is based on the text: “On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’”³²⁵

It should be noted that the perceived close spiritual connection to the “New Testament church” is not to the exclusion of the Old Testament, and this is also reflected in the worship. For example, choir members in Belarus are often called Levites, referring to temple worship in Israel. The orchestras and musical groups “solemnly and reverently praise the Savior, worthy of continuing the traditions of their predecessors, the Levites of the Old Testament.”³²⁶

Early Russian-speaking Baptists also used the Old Testament, specifically the Psalms, to justify the introduction of musical instruments into worship services (in contrast to the Orthodox practice):

You know that I was raised in a Molokan family and all my ancestors strictly adhered to Molokan practices, said Vasily Gurievich [Pavlov]. “We always sang psalms without musical accompaniment. I do not, however, find any ban on music in the Bible. Let us recall the psalmist David, who praised the Lord not only with his lips but with musical instruments. ‘Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet, praise Him with the psaltery and harp, praise Him with strings and organ,’ the singer of Israel called to the faithful. Why should we forbid worshipping our Creator and Savior on musical instruments?”³²⁷

Other features of a traditional service indicate further references to Old Testament practice. Among these would be the significance of the celebration of Harvest.³²⁸ Furthermore, men and women sit separately from each other in many churches imitating the model of the temple and synagogues. A house of prayer is sometimes called a “temple,” and consecration of houses of prayer follow the example of Solomon’s dedication of the temple (see 4.2.1.3 below). The Old Testament idea of holiness in the place where God dwells is applied to the house of prayer: a reverend attitude and appropriate behavior in the house and in its territory are required, as well as special solemnity and reverence in worship.³²⁹

³²⁵ John 20:19. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the use of the Lord’s Prayer caused a split of opinion at the early stage of the evangelical movement in Russian-speaking communities. See Gregory Shipkov, “Molitva Gospodnya” [The Lord’s Prayer], *Baptist*, no. 17 (September 1909): 4-5; *Baptist*, no. 17 (1909), p. 5.

³²⁶ V. Volchanskiy, “O sluzhenii orkestrov” [On the Orchestra Ministry], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 3 (1982), p. 55. A minister may pray “for the blessing of the Levitical ministry,” and a choir director may ask, “Lord, bless us, the Levites” (12 October 2008). It is interesting that a regular youth music festival of the Baptist Union in Russia is called the Levites (Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Russia, official website, <http://baptist.org.ru/read/article/96272>, last accessed 2 March 2017).

³²⁷ Popov, *Stopy Blagovestnika*, p. 250.

³²⁸ See footnote 600.

³²⁹ QM, 2012.

4.1.2. Unattainable ideal

These examples illustrate the role of the theology of returning to the origins. However, the New Testament, and even more so the Bible as a whole, does not offer a single example of the worship service. Besides, the New Testament demonstrates the worship service as subject to a specific logic of development, as can be seen by comparing the description of the service in Acts with that in the Epistles of Paul.³³⁰ Indeed, the sheer variety of approaches to worship in the evangelical environment indicates that automatic transfer is not possible: it will inevitably be context-dependent. That is why Karl Barth defined such attempts as “ecclesiastical romanticism.”³³¹ Or as well-known liturgist, Robert Taft, puts it:

For Christians, the only “ideal period of liturgy” is the one they are living in. A nostalgic vision of Christian tradition was a basic error of the Protestant Reformation, the notion that there was some ideal evangelical past to which one could return. Some lovers of eastern liturgy make the same mistake, playing the same “pick a century” game. The only difference is that they pick the classic patristic age of late antiquity, whereas the Protestant Reformers opted for apostolic times. But Paul tells us in Second Corinthians 6:2, “Behold, now is the acceptable time . . . now is the day of salvation.”³³²

The lack of detailed information about early church worship, coupled with understanding that there has been a variety of forms and paying heed to the danger of legalism in conducting worship services, ought to make one exercise restraint in claiming to adopt New Testament church practice and identification of present forms with apostolic ones. This note of caution is indeed echoed by a number of authoritative ministers of the Russian-speaking fellowship, including some of the shapers of the tradition, who have warned against simplistic arrangements and legalism in the practice of worship. Ivan Gnida, a prominent minister of AUCECB, states: “We do not find an unambiguous description of worship service order and church statutes in the New Testament.”³³³ Consequently, as long as a worship service contains sermons, singing and prayer,³³⁴ any kind of order could be adopted by the church if everything is “done properly and in an orderly manner”³³⁵ and if it generally corresponds to the New Testament spirit.

³³⁰ Leonid Mikhovich, “Pokloneniye i bogoslužheniye” [Worship and Public Worship], in *Slavyanskiy bibleyskiy kommentariy: sovremennaya evangel'skaya perspektiva* [Slavic Biblical Commentary: Modern Evangelical Perspective], ed. S.V. Sannikov (EAAA, 2016): 177-178. See also ch. 7 in James D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament. An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, sec. ed. (London: SCM Press; Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1990) on development and diversity of forms of worship in the New Testament. Dunn presents Christ as a unifying element for various forms. The process of development of the sermon as an element of public worship in New Testament times within the early church is well described in the book N.I. Barsov, *Istoriya pervobytnoy khristianskoy propovedi do IV veka* [The History of Primitive Christian Preaching to the IV Century] (Moskva: “Librokom,” 2012).

³³¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, IV/1*, trans. G.W. Bromiley, “The Doctrine of Reconciliation” (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), p. 704.

³³² Robert Taft, S.J., “‘Eastern Presuppositions’ and Western Liturgical Renewal,” <http://www.archeparchy.ca/documents/Taft%20Eastern%20Presuppositions.pdf>, last accessed 30 January 2011.

³³³ I.S. Gnida, “Poryadok provedeniya bogoslužhenii v tserkvakh evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov” [The Order of Worship in the Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 4 (1988): 71.

³³⁴ Karev designates these components “sacred rites” (“Sviashchennodeistviya tserkvi,” p. 36).

³³⁵ 1 Cor. 14:40.

As for the Old Testament, the references are contradictory. On the one hand the Old Testament is used to find the basis for the employment of musical instruments by encouraging worshipping the Lord “with stringed instruments and pipe,”³³⁶ yet on the other hand traditional worshippers are usually apprehensive about “loud cymbals” as found in the next verse, and even more so about “timbrel and dancing.”³³⁷ David’s psalms are used in congregational singing on very rare occasions. Neither is any importance attached to the fact that in Old Testament times only the Levite men ministered as musicians. In this respect Russian-speaking Baptist churches provide an example of the significant hermeneutical problem of the Old Testament’s relevance in the life of the “New Testament church.”

There is another reason to be reluctant in concentrating on either the Old or the New Testament as the basis for public worship. Paying exclusive attention to “the biblical basis” leads to neglecting the history of public worship (assuming that there was nothing good between today’s church and the early Christians) and often precludes evangelical believers from comprehending the time period of almost two thousand years, and the opportunities hidden in the history of the Church and in its various traditions. Traditional churches limit themselves, especially in music, to the period of about the last one hundred fifty years (which is nevertheless considerably larger than the churches promoting modern worship styles) but they deprive themselves of the treasures of centuries of church worship. On the other hand, in seeking to go back to Christian origins these churches are able to operate within a simple standard for worship evaluation. They cling to an anchor, which looks firm and stable in the present frightening diversity, and hold a compass in their hands that guides their way. So, in each particular context, a new “New Testament church” is born.

4.2 Religious context

4.2.1. *Leaving Orthodoxy*

The religious—and particularly Orthodox—context has played an important role in the formation of worship.³³⁸ This section examines early relations between the evangelical

³³⁶ Psalm 150:4b.

³³⁷ Psalm 150:4a.

³³⁸ The Roman Catholic church is the second largest denomination in Belarus. According to the official website of the Roman Catholic Church in Belarus there are 1 402 605 Catholics in Belarus (around 15% of the population) (<http://www.catholic.by/2/belarus/dioceses.html>, last accessed 16 May 2019.) However, it has not had such an important role in shaping Baptist identity as the Orthodox Church. First of all, this relates to the fact that the Orthodox Church was dominant during the early stages of the evangelical movement. At the same time in western Belarus, which happened to be under the dominion of Poland from 1921 to 1939, the Roman Catholic church enjoyed a privileged position, which led to the growth of percentage of Catholics from 42,7% in 1921 to 48 % in 1931. (A. Vabishchevich, “Zachodniaja Bielarus pad uladaj Pol’shchy. Dukhounaje zhytsia va umovakh palanizatsyi” [Belarus under the rule of Poland. Spiritual life in polanization], in *Historyia Bielarusi* [History of

movement and the Russian Orthodox Church and Orthodox services. It demonstrates that negative attitudes toward Orthodox services influenced the formation of evangelical worship in large measure, but at the same time some features of Orthodox worship were retained.

Liturgy has a dominant role in Orthodox worship. Fundamentally, Orthodoxy is a church performing liturgy.³³⁹ When an Anglican minister asked Patriarch Aleksiy of Moscow to describe the Orthodox Church in a sentence, he was famously told, “It is the church which celebrates the Divine Liturgy.”³⁴⁰ Considering the fact that almost all pioneers of the evangelical movement in Belarus came out of an Orthodox environment, it is noteworthy that the Baptists rejected that familiar, rich form, and preferred to adopt a simple fellowship, consisting of unsophisticated Bible interpretation, simple-hearted prayers, and common non-professional singing.³⁴¹ How could a Belarusian with high regard for ritual and liturgy go along a path of such a reduction of religious tradition? How could they turn to an “alien faith” if, in Dostoevsky’s words, “everything he is looking for [is] in Orthodoxy?”³⁴²

To answer this question, an Orthodox scholar has suggested that

the Belarusian nature includes a trait which is instrumental in being attracted to Baptist doctrine. . . For him (the Belarusian), as a practical man, it seems very attractive and tempting to get that easy salvation which Baptists preach because it requires neither to keep a priest, nor to build temples, nor to buy candles and communion bread. It is necessary only to believe, and good people, the leaders of the community will teach you for nothing how to believe.³⁴³

If a peasant could not pay for baptisms, weddings, funerals, sprinkling cattle and crops,

Belarus], Collection in 6 vols., vol. 5 (Minsk: Ekaperspektyva, 2006): 438-441.) But the dynamics of the relationships in the triangle of evangelical Christians – Orthodox – Catholics did not significantly change during such a relatively brief span, and the Roman Catholic Church was more associated with Poland and Polish people in people’s minds. It is interesting that presently many Catholic churches in Belarus conduct their worship both in Belarusian and in Polish.

³³⁹ Iakov Stamulis, ed., *Pravoslavnoye bogolovie missii segodnya* [Orthodox Mission Theology Today] (Moskva: Pravoslavny Sviato-Tikhonovskiy Bogoslovskiy institut, 2003), p. 253.

³⁴⁰ David Hilborn, “[An] Evangelical Perspective on Orthodox Liturgy. The Place of Liturgy in Orthodoxy and Evangelism,” in *Baptist and the Orthodox Church. On the way to understanding*, ed. Ian M. Randall (Praha: An Occasional Publication of the IBTS, 2003), p. 64.

³⁴¹ Archive records allow us to come to the conclusion that a number of Baptist communities appeared due exclusively to conversions of the Orthodox population, e.g., in western Belarus in the 1920s and 1930s (P.I. Vdovichenko, *Kritika ideologii sovremennogo baptizma (po materialam Belorusskoy SSR)*. Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata filosofskikh nauk [The critique of modern Baptist ideology (according to the records of Belarussian SSR), Abstract of Dissertation for the Degree of Candidate of Philosophical Sciences] (Minsk: Belorusskiy gosudarstvennyy universitet, 1966), p. 5). The situation would be similar in other parts of Belarus in the early period, although there were variations over time. For example, the archive of a church in Lesovnia, Minsk region indicates that nine people were accepted into the community in 1979 and they all came from Orthodox homes. In 1983 there were ten more and they all had Orthodox backgrounds (Archive, Church ECB in Lesovnia, Minsk region). A report of a Representative of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of BSSR, dated 15 January 1986, states that 62% of the people who joined Baptists, Pentecostals and Seventh day Adventists by water baptism came from believers’ homes, 31.4% from Orthodox homes, 6.0% from non-Christian homes and other religions and only 0.6% came from Roman Catholic homes in the period between 1965 and 1985.

³⁴² Dostoevsky, *Dnevnik Pisatelya*, vol. 12, p. 70.

³⁴³ Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundo-baptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae*, p. 20.

and other services in the church, or if he had to arrange a feast for christenings, weddings, and church festivals, the financial interest might be one of the reasons for rejecting Orthodoxy, but it seems unlikely that this was a significant consideration; one might save money by rejecting alcohol.³⁴⁴ Moreover, by becoming Baptist, they accepted strict ethical standards which were backed by church discipline, and were at risk of persecution which often included serious material losses.³⁴⁵

In fact, an argument could be made that many God-seekers among the Orthodox were hungry and thirsty for righteousness,³⁴⁶ and “the Orthodox Church was failing to meet many of the religious needs of the population.”³⁴⁷ Historians who have assessed the situation also point to the declining numbers of Orthodox churches and clergy in proportion to the increasing population. “For every Orthodox inhabitant of the empire at the end of the nineteenth century, there were half as many churches, two and a half times fewer monks, and almost a sixth as many monasteries than half a century before.”³⁴⁸ Some researchers believe that by 1918, in Russian society only one person out of a hundred was an active and conscious believer.³⁴⁹

However, from the evangelical point of view the primary problem was the Orthodox liturgy itself. The nature of the celebration of the liturgy was one question but, more importantly, the liturgy was not associated with ethical teaching. A large number of complex, prescribed rituals expressed in an ancient language were essential to formal participation in the liturgy. As noted by the Romanian Orthodox theologian Ion Bria, “if the language and vocabulary make the text impossible to understand, the people are bound to ignore it. This inevitably breaks any connection between the liturgy and the liturgy after the liturgy.”³⁵⁰ “The necessary balance

³⁴⁴ Shtundists and Baptists took a strong stance against drunkenness. In 1912 an Orthodox priest in Tver’ A. Vvedenskiy wrote in his article, “Village people are hungry in the Orthodox church and they get rich if they belong to Shtundists. Why is that? It is because they used to drink and when they join the sect, they stop drinking.” (“P’yanstvo i sektantstvo (k nashey polemike s sektantami)” [Drunkenness and Sectarianism (about our polemic with sectarians)], *Mogilevskiy yeparkhial’nyye vedomosti* [Mogilev Eparchy News], no. 20 (1912), *Neofitsial’naya chast’* [Informal part], p. 697.)

³⁴⁵ There were, however, some benefits that promoted Baptist faith across the land. For example, the priests of Mogilev Orthodox eparchy believed that a considerable growth in the number of “sectarians” was due to high level of charity or mutual assistance in Baptist churches. The priests proved the point by citing the common beliefs of Orthodox village people, “Whatever you may say, . . . that guy got a horse, . . . a house was built for that man . . . and new clothes were made for those children. . . they helped to sow a field for that man. . . They do it for each other. . . And here we are: nobody will stretch a hand for you to pull you out of water if you drown. . . You could starve to death and nobody cares. . . as if I am not a Christian. . . well, it seems that they have the truth.” (“Polozheniye sektantstva v predelakh Mogilevskoy yeparkhii i mery dlya bor’by s nim,” p. 298.)

³⁴⁶ It is interesting to read about spiritual movements in the Russian Empire, which did not conform to the State, including the Strigolniki, the Khlysty, the Baptists, and others. See Serge Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1949).

³⁴⁷ Wardin, “How Indigenous Was the Baptist Movement in the Russian Empire,” p. 32.

³⁴⁸ Vladimir Kantor, “Imperskiy kontekst russkogo pravoslaviya” [The Imperial Context of Russian Orthodoxy], *Vtoraya navigatsiya*, no. 5 (Zaporozh’e: Dikoe pole, 2006): 54. Data from P.N. Milyukov, *Ocherki po istorii russkoi kul’tury* [Essays on the History of Russian Culture], Collection in 3 vols., vol. 2, p. 198.

³⁴⁹ A.B. Zubov, “Sorok dney ili sorok let?” [Forty days or forty years?] *New World*, no. 5 (1999); Kantor, “Imperskiy kontekst russkogo pravoslaviya,” p. 55.

³⁵⁰ Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva:

between the content of the faith and its external religious demonstration” is not preserved.³⁵¹

Another argument was the claim that pagan ideas were present in Orthodox life and ceremonies. Georgiy Florovskiy, an Orthodox thinker, theologian, and historian, wrote about a “second culture”, a kind of syncretism, “in which local pagan ‘experiences’ were fused with stray motifs of ancient mythology and Christian imagination.”³⁵² In everyday life, “koliady,” an ancient pagan festival related to the winter solstice was mixed up with the celebration of Christmas. Simple Orthodox people who diligently attended the church could believe “in a bogeyman, and also wood and water goblins.”³⁵³ Such superstitious everyday phenomena, albeit at the level of folklore and not at the level of official Orthodox theology, provided many reasons for the criticism of Orthodoxy by evangelical Christians. Large-scale conversions into Shtundism and Baptist expressions of faith in the early years of the movement attracted the attention of the authorities who considered the relationship to Orthodoxy as an expression of loyalty to the State itself.³⁵⁴ It must be taken into account that the Orthodox Church in the Russian Empire was identified with nationality, and the majority of Belarusians, as well as Russians and Ukrainians, were considered to be Orthodox by birth. At the end of the nineteenth century, “unauthorized conversion from Orthodoxy to any other denomination” had been declared “a forbidden and even criminal act.”³⁵⁵

Therefore laws gave local administrative and police authorities opportunities to appoint “a competent official for attending [‘sectarian’] worship and prayer services,” who should oversee that

“a) another meeting would not take place as an excuse of being a worship or prayer service, and b) there would not be any desecration or defamation of dogmas, rituals and traditions of the Orthodox Church, nor any profanities in regard to it or its faith objects; and there must not be any invitation toward apostasy from the Orthodoxy.”³⁵⁶

World Council of Churches, 1996), p. 23. The author uses the expression “The liturgy after the liturgy” in order to demonstrate the relationship between worship and engagement in the life of the society.

³⁵¹ Alexander Borisov, *Pobeleвшie nivy. Razmyshleniya o Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi* [Whitened Fields. Reflections on the Russian Orthodox Church] (Moskva: “Put’,” 1994), p. 100. This problem characterizes not only the past but also modern times. Thus, a contemporary scholar of religion in the south of Belarus believes that the current situation is deteriorating and that Orthodoxy is increasingly evolving towards belief in the rites. (T.I. Predko, *Dinamika sinkreticheskoi religioznosti zhitelei byelorusskogo Poles’ya*. Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata filosofskikh nauk [Dynamics of Syncretic Religiosity of Belarusian Polesie residents. Abstract of Dissertation for the Degree of Candidate of Philosophical Sciences] (Minsk: Belorusskiy gosudarstvennyy universitet, 2009), p. 3.)

³⁵² Georgiy Florovskiy, *Puti russkogo bogosloviya* [Ways of Russian Theology] (Paris: YMCA-PRESS, 1937), p. 3. Also, Donald Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy through Western Eyes* (Louisville/ London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 132.

³⁵³ See Tatyana Nikol’skaya, *Russkiy Protestantizm i gosudarstvennaya vlast’ v 1905-1991 godakh* [Russian Protestantism and the Government in 1905-1991] (Sankt-Peterburg: Evropeiskiy universitet v Sankt-Peterburge, 2009), p. 37.

³⁵⁴ Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundo-baptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae*, p. 28.

³⁵⁵ Decision of the Government no. 10, Sept. 1891. In Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundo-baptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae*, pp. 29-30.

³⁵⁶ *Baptist*, no. 6 (March, 1909), p. 21. See also Cirkulyar MVD, Departament dukhovnyh del –

A Circular of the Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, directed to the Office of the Minsk governor, explained that meetings of sectarians “allowed not only for public vilification of the teachings of the Orthodox Church and its institutions, and an open call for the rejection of Orthodoxy, but also blasphemy.”³⁵⁷ According to the Circular,

signs of Baptist crimes . . . presented the following elements of their worship: a) general singing of specially selected Bible verses and hymns from the liturgical books of the sect, such as “Voices of Faith,” “Spiritual Poems,” “Offerings of Christians,” and others, and b) reading selected portions of Scripture by any member of the congregation, or preaching and interpreting false doctrine in the spirit of the sect, and c) kneeling prayers or the utterance of improvised, inspirational prayers, without the use of the sign of the cross.³⁵⁸

It is important to note that the opposition to evangelical groupings was a gradual development. Many Shtundists were slow at first to officially withdraw from the Orthodox Church and to organize their own communities. Often they continued to attend Orthodox services while, at the same time, gathering separately to study the Bible.³⁵⁹ Even though some peasants in Belarus had embraced evangelical faith, “yet [they] did not dare to openly declare the final break with Orthodoxy.”³⁶⁰ On August 24, 1878 government officials took the following report from the Dubovy Log Baptists in Gomel district: “Although we never avoided the holy sacraments and rites of the Orthodox Church, and as peasants at first considered such ceremonies as external and not essential, in the future we will remain her faithful sons forever, sacredly and steadily preserving all of its decisions to the end of our life.” A year later, however, they announced a decisive break from the Orthodox Church, declaring: “We are of the evangelical faith and we belong to the new Russian Christian fellowship.” These peasants, it was reported, “publicly [expressed] contempt for icons, [called] the church a whore, and [criticized] fasting.”³⁶¹

Several reasons contributed to a formal separation from Orthodoxy. First, frequent attacks from government officials, Church authorities and the “Orthodox folk” pressed the Evangelicals, often against their own will, to the other side. Even those who did not actively oppose the

Gubernatoram, Nachal'nikam oblastei, Gradonachal'nikam ot 4 oktyabrya 1910 g. [MIF Circular letter, Department of Spiritual Affairs to the Governors, Oblast leaders and City leaders, written on October 4, 1910], NHAB, Stock 295. – File 1, Case 8462, p. 9. These decisions were seldom carried out in practice (Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundo-baptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae*, p. 29).

³⁵⁷ NHAB, Stock 295, File 1, Case 8462, p. 6. It is possible to interpret what is meant by “blasphemy” in the light of this circular of the Minister of Justice, April 3, 1900 no. 10677.

³⁵⁸ V.D. Bonch-Bruevich, *Iz mira sektantov* [From the World of Sectarians] (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1922), p. 175.

³⁵⁹ J.A. Hebly, *Protestants in Russia* (Belfast: Christian Journals, 1976), p. 50.

³⁶⁰ See Coleman, *Russian Baptists & Spiritual Revolution 1905-1929*, p. 16; *Istoriya Evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, p. 59; Rozhdestvensky, *Yuzhnorussky Shtundism*, p. 98.

³⁶¹ CSHA, Stock 1284, File 220, Case 12, pp. 14, 21b. Report of Mogilev Governor to Minister of Interior Affairs, in Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptizm i Baptisty*, p. 16.

dominant religion were accused of being “enemies of the people” by hostile actions on the part of the Orthodox, Church hierarchy and secular authorities because the “evangelical form of life represented a theological and political threat to Orthodoxy.”³⁶² Thus, they had to choose whether to remain within Orthodoxy or to claim allegiance to the Gospel as they understood it.³⁶³ Second, the hoped-for changes in Orthodox churches had not occurred, and, realizing the futility of their efforts to revitalize Orthodoxy, a number of evangelicals decided to concentrate on developing their own churches.³⁶⁴ Third, the awareness of their particular identity eventually led to separation. The Pashkovtsy, for example, did not plan to leave the church, but, as Geoffrey Ellis and Wesley Jones say, “the trappings of Orthodoxy such as the worship of the Virgin Mary, prayers to saints and prayers for the dead, devotion to icons and relics, and the doctrine of salvation by good works were becoming less and less acceptable with increasing knowledge of the Bible.”³⁶⁵ Such separation in any case became inevitable because the history, theology and liturgical practice of these new communities and the Orthodox church differed too much for it to be possible to work together in the spiritual revival of the people.³⁶⁶

4.2.2. *The shaping of worship in opposition to the Orthodoxy*

Radical simplification of liturgy and the rejection of rituals was indeed a reaction against Orthodoxy rather than a simple import from the West. One can speak of “resistant”³⁶⁷ or “negative identity”³⁶⁸ of evangelical believers, or “anti-Orthodox doctrinal orientation of

³⁶² Puzynin, *Tradiciya evangel'skikh khristian*, p. 84.

³⁶³ Cherenkov, *Evropeis'ka rephormaciya ta ukrain'sky evangel'sky Protestantism*, p. 16.

³⁶⁴ Some attempts were made by Evangelical Christians and Baptists who hoped for the reformation of Orthodoxy in the evangelical spirit and were attempting to join efforts for spiritual and moral renewal of the Church and people. For example, Prokhanov in 1922 addressed the Orthodox with a plea to start a reformation in the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, publishing 100,000 copies of “Evangel'sky klitch.” (Mitskevich, *Istoriya Evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov*, p. 214.) Prokhanov sought contact with such “dissenters” (“renovators”) as “Living Church,” “Ancient Apostolic Church,” and “Church renewal” (Shenderovsky, *Ivan Prokhanov*, pp. 128-129). There were also several cases of preachers from Baptists and Evangelical Christians being invited to preach in Orthodox churches (Martsinkovskiy, *Zapisky veruyuschego*, p. 195). Christians such as Martsinkovskiy were attempting to reform Orthodoxy from the inside: “When I was baptized by faith I did not have any intention to leave Orthodoxy. At that time I believed in the opportunity for evangelical reform from the inside and even considered it necessary for me to stay in its midst in order to testify about the importance of personal revival and conscious admittance of each responsible member of the Church; therefore I did not leave Orthodoxy formally . . . But due to my above-mentioned action (baptism in an evangelical church) I became an outsider of that church because it ceased to consider me its member and it did not permit me to take part in the sacraments.” (Ibid, p. 218.)

³⁶⁵ Ellis and Jones, *Drugaya revolyutsiya*, p. 125.

³⁶⁶ An observation of the present situation shows that the romantic idea of the possible cooperation of Evangelicals and the Orthodox is as in the past, alive only within a few members who keep contact with Orthodoxy at the level of conferences or educational programs. Ordinary believers, familiar with local Orthodoxy, do not generally see opportunities for collaboration. On differences in doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists and the Orthodox from a Baptist viewpoint, see for example, V.P. Trubchik, *Vera i traditsiya* [Faith and Tradition] (Minsk: Soyuz YEKHB, 2009). Trubchik, a Belarussian author, editor of *Krynitsa Zhyttsya* magazine and Baptist church minister, contrasts Orthodox and evangelical teaching against each other as “outward and lifeless form” and “the essence of Christ’s teaching” (p. 290).

³⁶⁷ Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, p. 90.

³⁶⁸ Cf. Pilli, “Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Estonia: The Shaping of Identity, 1945-1991,” p. 139.

doctrinal and religious principles of those structures” in early and modern forms of Belarusian Protestantism.³⁶⁹ From the evangelical point of view, the magnificence of liturgy, enigmatic beauty of Church Slavonic language, gorgeous decorations, and luxurious priestly garments became obstacles to knowing God; aesthetic or mystical experience replaced a truly spiritual relationship with the Heavenly Father. Thus one of the first evangelical Christians in St. Petersburg, describing the situation in the Orthodox Church at the end of the nineteenth century, noted the pomp and luxury of the worship and complained that “instead of making [the Gospel] easier for a person to understand great truths of God, [the rites and priestly garments] made it even harder.”³⁷⁰ Prokhanov, analyzing the situation in Russia at the turn of nineteenth and twentieth centuries, made similar criticisms:

The [Orthodox] church appeared to be flourishing. There were luxurious temples with golden domes. Worship service was held in the midst of splendorous golden glitter, silver, precious stones and decorations, and expensive priestly garments. Externally it all looked admirable, but what was the internal condition of the hearts? The service consisted mostly of ritual liturgy and there was almost no room for edification and sermon. The people did not know the Word of God.³⁷¹

As a reaction, evangelical Christians firmly rejected the liturgical practices of the Orthodox Church, as well as other liturgical and doctrinal expressions of the Orthodox faith. An accusation against evangelical peasants in Dubovy Log village in Gomel district are a typical example: “Ivan Ivanov, Alexander Andreev, Zakhar Grigoriev, Semion Fedorov and their families stopped performing Orthodox rites, do not come to church, do not keep the fast, and do not honor saints . . . these peasants try to spread the above-mentioned doctrine in their village.”³⁷²

Special attention should be given to the rejection of icons and of using them as objects of worship, along with the removal of the breast cross, which became a distinctive characteristic of new converts and which remains one of the key issues dividing the Eastern Slavic Baptists and

³⁶⁹ I.F. Rekuts, *Protestantism i khudozhestvennaya kul'tura Belarusi* [Protestantism and Artistic Culture of Belarus] (Minsk: Belorusskiy gosudarstvennyy universitet, 1995), p. 3.

In this regard the comprehensive doctrinal statement of the Pentecostal church in Belarus seems instructive. They carry out their ministry in the same Orthodox and partly Catholic context. While they defined their doctrinal stand, generally matching the Nicene Creed, they also included a chapter into their doctrinal statement on Confessional features of the Pentecostal Church. The entire chapter, except for the first point, is based on negations, such as “we do not believe...” or “we do not practice...” Among the aspects negated are relics, special priestly robes, the sign of the cross, icons and statues, infant baptism and prayers to the saints and the Virgin (capitalized in the original) Mary. See *Verouchenie Ob'edinionnoi tserkvi khristian very evangel'skoi v Respublike Belarus'*, izd. 2 [Doctrine of Faith of the United Church of Christian of Evangelical Faith in Republic of Belarus, sec. ed.] (Minsk, “Positive-center,” 2012), pp. 19-21. It is interesting, however, that in new churches professing the modern style of worship, worship is formed in opposition to traditional Baptist worship, rather than to Orthodox liturgy. Orthodoxy, especially for a resident of a large city, no longer plays such a significant role as before.

³⁷⁰ Liven, *Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie v Rossii*, p. 21.

³⁷¹ Prokhanov, *V kotle Rossii*, p. 20.

³⁷² CSHA, Stock 1284, File 220, Case 12, p. 1, 1b. Report of Mogilev Governor to Minister of Interior Affairs, in Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptism i Baptisty*, p. 17

the Orthodox. Thus, in the 1920s, Orthodox priests were known to order people not to associate with “apostates who reject the Lord’s cross and holy icons.”³⁷³ According to some accusations, “sectarians” dared to take down icons and to be disrespectful to them. Sometimes icons were thrown out or even destroyed.³⁷⁴ An example of an iconoclastic conflict took place at the beginning of the twentieth century in the Slutsk district, Minsk province where peasant Karl Korshunov declared: “‘We do not have to worship the cross, or icons, because these are only the portraits.’ [Korshunov’s] brothers who saw that he was not even at confession, did not like such apostasy. . . and beat him the other day...”³⁷⁵

A mid-twentieth century anti-Orthodox poem expresses the relation of Baptists in Belarus towards icons:

My God is no icon with smouldering incense,
 Old women in churches can worship such gods.
 For God is no image, so still, unconvincing,
 Unable to wake people's hearts.
 This image can hear no cries of the hopeless
 Because it was painted by hand
 I see someone leaning on it, weak and forceless,
 In hope that their struggles will end.
 But this is an image, so still and unmoving,
 It hears no entreaties or prayers of men
 You leave unallayed and with no consolation
 And plunge into worries again.³⁷⁶

The negative attitude of Baptists towards icons became a kind of trademark. It radically transformed both the worship space and its meaning. At the same time, the denial of priesthood was of no less importance. A clear-cut division between the priesthood and the laity in the Orthodox tradition yielded to the priesthood of all Christians in the evangelical communities, which meant that all Christians were expected to take part in the worship service. This requirement was met in the attention to common singing, the usage of musical instruments, and such elements as testimonies, recitations and participation in prayer of all those who would volunteer.

Assuming that the Orthodox liturgy left no room for instruction, evangelicals put forward the preaching of the Gospel rather than liturgy, “plenty of instruction by the Word of God,”

³⁷³ Akinchyts, “120-letie Dzekuts-Maleya,” p. 14.

³⁷⁴ On examples of extreme disregard of icons, especially among Shtundists, see S. Margaritov, *Istoriya russkikh misticheskikh i racionalisticheskikh sekt* [History of Russian Mystic and Rationalistic Sects], 4th ed., corrected and supplemented (Simferopol’: Tavrich. gub. tip., 1914), p. 183; Kahle, *Evangel’skie khristiane v Rossii i Sovetskoy Soyuz*, p. 526; Rozhdestvensky, *Yuzhnorussky Shtundism*, p. 186.

³⁷⁵ The Case of Conversions of Karl Korshunov’s Recalcitrant Peasants from the Orthodox Church into Shtundism (Rachkan village, Slutsk uyezd). The protocol was composed by a police officer in Slutsk. (National Historical Archive of Belarus (NHAB), Stock 136, File 1, Case 37077, pp, 1-2.

³⁷⁶ The poem “Moi Bog” (My God), *Stikhotvoreniya, declamatsii, istorii*, first – third verses. Songs and poems in chapters 3-5 are put into poetry in English by Oksana Ostapovich.

which meant a radical shift to a verbal mode of communication. Regarding this, again the meetings of the first Christians were taken as an example: “Christians gathered in the true sense of the word around the Word of God.”³⁷⁷ Special attention was paid to instruction which helped apply truth in life and associate worship with behavior. Interestingly, however, at the same time Baptists continued to use the Synodal translation, itself richly endowed with Orthodox vocabulary.³⁷⁸

Rituals which were seen as obstacles to the knowledge of God gave way to “personal” communication with God—an opportunity afforded by extempore prayer as opposed to the prescribed Orthodox prayers. Baptists emphasized prayer as a simple, sincere conversation with God from the heart. This practice remains a distinctive of evangelical churches.

The changes conditioned by negative attitudes to Orthodox forms were truly dramatic. It was not a reformation or modification of a cult, but a radically different kind of worship. If initially there had been some attempts to achieve compromise, the evangelical Christians later came to the conviction that “returning to the New Testament church” required a complete break; corrections and modernizations seemed inappropriate.

“But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. Nor do *people* put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved” (Matt. 9:16-17).

“New” garments and “new” bottles were needed for new movements; “old bottles” which interfered with spiritual life and freedom of fellowship with God had to be forsaken.

4.2.3. Influence of Orthodoxy on Baptist worship

The life and ministry in the Orthodox environment, however, left its mark in Baptist worship.³⁷⁹ It is expressed both in the spirit or atmosphere of the worship and in its content and form. One could immediately mention services dedicated to events of the life of Christ such as the Lord's Baptism, The Meeting of the Lord,³⁸⁰ or the Transfiguration. Annunciation Day draws attention to Mary, but she is presented not as an intercessor, patron, or Mother of God, but as a

³⁷⁷ K.V. Somov, “O propovedi i propovednikakh” [About Preaching and Preachers], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 2 (1964): 33.

³⁷⁸ There are a lot of words adapted from the Orthodox lexicon in the Synodal translation, for example, “iyerey” (high priest, Hag. 2:4), “ipostas” (exact representation, Heb. 1:3), “kadilo” (censer, Ezek. 8:11), “kivot” (ark, 1 Kings 14:18), “ladan” (frankincense, Matt. 2:11), “lampada” (lamp, Exod. 25:37), “milot” (mantle, 1 Kings 19:13), “podir” (robe extending down to one’s feet, Rev. 1:13), “poprazdnestvo” (solemn assembly, Neh. 8:18), “prepodobnyy” (godly ones, 2 Chron. 6:41), “riza” (robe, Isa. 6:1), “tainstvo” (mystery, 1 Tim. 2:9), “felon” (cloak, 2 Tim. 4:13).

³⁷⁹ See Constantine Prokhorov, “Baptists and the Orthodox Church,” in I.M. Randall, ed., *Baptist and the Orthodox Church. On the Way to Understanding*. Praha: IBTS (2003): 98-112.

³⁸⁰ A Christian festival held on February 15 to commemorate the presentation of Christ in the Temple (Luke 2:22-35). The Slavonic name of the festival—*Sretenie*—is literally “The Meeting.”

good example of humility and obedience to God's will and as one who also needs salvation. The name of the holiday, The Annunciation,³⁸¹ indicates that the most important thing is the good news of the birth of the Savior of the world.³⁸²

Major holidays of the year, Easter and Christmas, also have the imprint of an Orthodox milieu. As an illustration one could mention the All-Night Vigil at Easter³⁸³ and singing the Easter *troparion* from then until Ascension Day.³⁸⁴ The dates of the celebrations also reflects the context. The twenty-first century has seen the transition of most Belarusian Baptist churches in celebrating Christmas in line with the Western Church, that is, on December 25th. However, taking context into account, many churches continue to celebrate Christmas for a second time, on January 7th, using the “second Christmas” primarily for evangelism in the Orthodox context.³⁸⁵ “First Christmas” is for “internal church use” and an awareness of unity with the evangelicals in other countries. The content of both the worship services is generally no different. The preachers use the same texts, and there are the same Christmas hymns. Yet in January, to take “Golgotha” church in Minsk as an illustration, the worship service has an evangelistic focus and there is a call to repentance. In other churches, such as “Light of Gospel” and “Bethlehem” in Minsk, there may be evening theater performances for non-Christian audiences.³⁸⁶

Orthodox origins and surroundings, perhaps in combination with national specifics, also explain restraint and reverence, especially in prayer, and showing respect to the worship

³⁸¹ In Russian *Blagoveshchenie* literally means “the proclamation of the good news.”

³⁸² Luke 1:47.

³⁸³ By the beginning of twenty first century the practice of holding all-night services has virtually become a thing of the past, but churches, especially in villages, used to practice it and the author himself took part as a child in Easter services which started at 10 p.m. and ended at 4 or 5 a.m. Preachers usually spoke about the sufferings of Christ until midnight; after midnight, the same preachers announced His resurrection. An all-night celebration took place in Voolka, Brest region in 2014. In Schatsk, Minsk region, Easter is celebrated from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. On this practice in the Russian Orthodox Church see M.S. Krasovitskaya, *Liturgica* [Liturgics] (Moskva: Pravoslavnyy Sviato-Tikhonovskiy Bogoslovskiy Institut, 1999), chs. 2, 8, 15; Orthodox encyclopedia under the editorship of Cyrill, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, on-line version, vol. 9, <http://www.pravenc.ru/text/155522.html>, last accessed 16 May 2019.

³⁸⁴ “Troparion” is the main festival hymn which highlights the most important points of the Church's teaching about the holiday. The Paschal *troparion*, sung three times at the beginning and three times at the conclusion of the meeting goes as follows: “Christ is risen from the dead, trampled death by death, and to those in the tombs He gave life.” (Krasovitskaya, *Liturgica*, ch. 5. V.M. Voskoboynikov *Illyustrirovannaya pravoslavnyaya entsiklopediya. Tolkovaniye simbolov i obryadov. Opisaniye glavneyshikh pravoslavnykh svyatyn'* [Illustrated Orthodox Encyclopedia. Interpretation of Symbols and Rituals. Description of the Main Orthodox Holy Places] (Moskva: EKSMO, 2008), p. 250.) For Christmas time “Silent Night,” which came from the West, is the main festival hymn.

³⁸⁵ The difference in the dates results from using either the Julian or Gregorian calendar. The Gregorian calendar was introduced in Russia (across the territory controlled by the Soviet Union) on January 26, 1918. There was an unsuccessful attempt to switch to this calendar in the Russian Orthodox Church in 1923 but it still uses Julian calendar (usually referred to as “an old style”). According to the old style, Christmas is celebrated on January 7. Other celebrations have also shifted two weeks ahead in comparison to Gregorian calendar (new style). For example, the Presentation of the Lord is celebrated on February 15 according to the old style and on February 2 according to the new style. Easter and related feasts sometimes coincide but more often they are celebrated later. On Julian and Gregorian calendars see Voskoboynikov, *Illyustrirovannaya pravoslavnyaya entsiklopediya. Tolkovaniye simbolov i obryadov. Opisaniye glavneyshikh pravoslavnykh svyatyn'*, p. 282; Orthodox encyclopedia under the editorship of Cyrill, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, vol. 29, <http://www.pravenc.ru/text/1319949.html>, last accessed 16 May 2019.

³⁸⁶ Personal notes, p. 20b.

location.³⁸⁷ In particular, kneeling during prayer is practiced in traditional Baptist worship services, though in recent times people may stand during the service. Prayer in the sitting position during a traditional meeting would not be considered appropriate.

Restraint and austerity are also expressed in relation to clothing. Cosmetics and jewelry are not encouraged, because immodesty in clothing may hurt the pious feelings of the Christians in a house of prayer.³⁸⁸ At the service there would be no room for entertainment, jokes, laughter or any other sort of informality, which would be perceived as a loss of reverence.³⁸⁹ (Likewise it is impossible to imagine laughter and jokes during Orthodox liturgy.) “Reverence” is accompanied by a special humility,³⁹⁰ contrition, and awe before the God of gods.

The content of a traditional Baptist worship service often has a discernible imprint of Orthodox theology. Emphasis on good works and their importance in salvation, grief and weeping over sin, humble appeal to His mercy and awareness of one’s own sinfulness and unworthiness in the sight of God are reminders of a well-known Orthodox motif, expressed in a prayer song “Lord, have mercy” (*Kyrie eleison*).³⁹¹ This feature is illustrated by one of the most famous Baptist hymns, beginning with the following words:

Oh, I'm a poor sinner! Honestly, I'm such a person;
If eternal God was not full of gifts,
If He was not full of love and He didn't save me,
I'd have perished in this world many years ago.³⁹²

Singing is one of the bridges leading to the permeation of Orthodox theology and worship character into ECB communities. As far back as the 1860s, some evangelical Christians who had split from Orthodoxy continued to sing Orthodox songs before their own songs were written.³⁹³ One favorite hymn of evangelical believers is “Strashno bushuet zHITEISKoye more” (The Sea of Life Is Terribly Raging), written in the nineteenth century by Ivan Kulzhinsky, an Orthodox school teacher in Chernigov.³⁹⁴ To give a particular example of the spread of Orthodox hymns, the author’s ad hoc examination of the repertoire of the first choir of ECB “Light of Gospel” church in Minsk at the beginning of 2008 revealed that a third of the hymns that were regularly

³⁸⁷ Wardin, “How Indigenous Was the Baptist Movement in the Russian Empire,” p. 36.

³⁸⁸ N. Shchavelin, “O blagogovenii v dome molitvy” [On Reverence in the House of Prayer], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 5 (1955): 41-43, p. 42.

³⁸⁹ Q, 2008.

³⁹⁰ Gnida, “Poryadok provedeniya bogoslužhenii v tserkvakh evangel’skih khristian-baptistov,” p. 72.

³⁹¹ It is interesting that this motif finds no place in contemporary worship in Baptist churches in Belarus. Perhaps it is explained by different circumstances of life (such as the lack of persecution) and close ties to Christians in the West, who rather stress assurance of salvation and joy in the Lord.

³⁹² “O, ya greshnik bednyi” [Oh, I’m a Poor Sinner], *Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 68, first stanza.

³⁹³ Kharlov, “Iz istorii muzikal’no-pevcheskogo služheniya nashego bratstva,” p. 46.

³⁹⁴ *Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 87.

sung in worship were the work of Orthodox authors.³⁹⁵ The Baptist style of performance, however, tends to be more classical and vivacious compared to the style of singing of the same hymns in an Orthodox church.

One may also note the perceived contrast between the themes of joy and sadness in singing. In 1933 Prokhanov, whose songs are widely used in traditional worship, contrasted evangelical music with that of the Orthodox and folk music in the following way:

The Orthodox Church music was beautiful, but sad, and this is quite natural, because their religion was pessimistic. The Orthodox Church said nothing about the new birth and renewal; it did not meet the needs of the people. On the other hand folk music also was full of grief and couldn't be useful. Having for centuries remained in serfdom and under the pressure of autocratic power, people were constantly living in fear and anxiety. All Russian music was mainly pessimistic and in a minor key. The music of the Evangelical Christian movement could not be sad, like popular folk music. It was not supposed to be similar to the minor [key] music of the Orthodox churches. Every evangelical Christian passed from darkness into light through his [sic.] conversion, feeling indescribable joy and happiness. His whole life was illuminated by bright rays of salvation in Christ, so I decided to do my best to make Gospel music express the supreme joy that exists on the earth, the joy, proceeding from heaven (Luke 15:7-23). Music should be of the same nature as the Gospel that contains joy. The rays of sunlight filled with optimism should penetrate through the rainy clouds of pessimism.³⁹⁶

Indeed, Prokhanov was a real optimist and he was inspired by church growth and the triumphant development of evangelical movement in Russia and the Soviet Union in the first third of the twentieth century. However, many years of persecution, including prisons and deportations, along with “sad” national and religious environments left a strong imprint on the character and practice of church ministry, and many of the hymns sung by today’s Baptists are in the minor key.

Another key point is the way in which Baptists use general terms for the Lord’s supper, baptism, marriage, dedication, ordination, consecration prayer, or prayer over the sick. They are referred to as “church acts,”³⁹⁷ but the terms “sacred rites,” “commandments,” even “sacraments” are also in use,³⁹⁸ and this must be considered as an influence of the Orthodox environment. Thus it is not uncommon for a preacher, when praying for the bread before communion, to ask “Oh, Lord, bless this sacrament,” or for a believer to pray for the “holy sacrament of Eucharist.”³⁹⁹ However, in paragraph 8.1 of the Doctrine of the Evangelical

³⁹⁵ Personal notes, p. 60.

Baptist composer V.M. Kreyman admired the music pieces of Arkhangelski, noting that they could be “wonderful models of simplicity in part leading and clarity of music language.” “The years go by but their value is not diminished, they resonate in the souls of the elderly and young, simple people and scholars.” V. Kreyman, “Nekotorye voprosy dukhovnogo muzykal’nogo tvorchestva” [Some Issues in Sacred Musical Creativity], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 4 (1980): 60. Of course, the work of such gifted composers as D.S. Bortniansky, A.A. Arkhangel'sky, or P.G. Chesnokov is beyond the scope of one denomination.

³⁹⁶ Prokhanov, *V kotle Rossii*, pp. 142-143.

³⁹⁷ “Tserkovnyie ustanovleniia.”

³⁹⁸ “Svyashchennodeistvia,” “zapovedi,” “tainstva.”

³⁹⁹ Baptist church in Borovliany, Minsk region. 7 October 2012 and 5 March 2017 (Personal notes, p. 28). This does not mean the preacher or the female believer believe in transubstantiation. The term simply reflects their

Christian Baptists Faith in Belarus, adopted at the ECB Congress of Belarus on March 15, 2003, baptism and the breaking of the bread are named as the Lord's commandments, and other "rites" (marriage, dedicating the children, ordination, consecration of the house of prayer, and prayer over the sick) are considered to be "church acts."⁴⁰⁰ (It is noteworthy that the document lists seven of them suggesting that they parallel the seven sacraments of the Orthodox Church.)

One more point of influence concerns special prayers for the needs of believers. As in the Orthodox Church, these play an important role in the Baptist worship service. In small churches, believers name their prayer requests aloud, while in larger churches, worshippers send notes listing their requests to the pastor before or during the service. This practice resembles prayer in Orthodox churches but, unlike Baptist churches, Orthodox churches have established a set of rules for writing and submitting prayer notes; for example, these notes should not contain a person's last name or middle name (patronymic), their ranks and titles or degrees of relation.⁴⁰¹

Even a general comparison of worship services in Orthodox and Baptist churches apparently testifies that Baptists in Belarus continue some aspects of the pre-Baptist context and reflect the spirit and character of the Orthodox tradition. On the other hand, the comparison also indicates a conscious and decisive rejection of much of liturgical practice, ceremonies, and such external attributes of worship as icons, candles, special garments, and so forth. Here we see again the desire to go back to the origins, to follow the Bible commandments in a more literal way (for example, the second commandment of the Decalogue in relation to icons) and to pour "new wine into new wineskins." It is paradoxically through both the imitation of the Orthodox tradition (whether consciously or unconsciously) and its total denial that new communities have been

awe and respect for the elements.

⁴⁰⁰ Different views on "sacred rites" are reflected in Russian-language Baptist literature. For example, Karev considered "sacred rites" to be church preaching, church singing, church prayer, baptism, Communion, ministry of Christian love, keeping peace in church and especially highlighting the word preached. ("Svyashchennodeistviya tserkvi.") Kolesnikov presents a more sacramental position, bringing water baptism, Communion (Lord's Supper), ordination, marriage, prayer for the sick and children, dedication of houses of prayer and funerals into the category of "sacred rites." (Kolesnikov N.A., *Khristianin! Znaesh li y kak dolzhno postupat' v dome Bozhiem?* [Christian! Do You Know How to Act in the House of God?] (Moskva: "Druzhba i blagaya vest'," 1998), p. 6.) Here are his words about water baptism, "God works out the sacrament of ordaining and transference of grace of the priesthood" (Ibid., p. 48).

The position of Belarusian Baptists in relation to the "sacred rites" has to be considered in terms of the historical and theological aspects as following the example of Baptists in the West. See a very helpful volume by Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, *Baptist Sacramentalism. Studies in Baptist History and Thoughts*, vol. 5 (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003). There are a number of various opinions and pro and contra arguments around this that also need to be considered; see Stanley K. Flower, *More Than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism. Studies in Baptist History and Thoughts*, vol. 2 (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002). David H.J. Gay takes a stand against sacramental position in *Baptist Sacramentalism. A Warning to Baptists* (Biggleswade: Brachus, 2011). The viewpoint of W. Robinson seems interesting as it "[contemplates] the rich devotional meaning which 'the two sacraments' must have had for many Christians of St. Paul's day, and might have for us if regarded in the same way." ("The Nature and Character of Christian Sacramental Theory and Practice," *The Baptist Quarterly*, vol. 10 (1940-1941): 411-420, p. 416.) Speaking of baptism, he notes that "It was not simply a recollection of a *past* experience, nor a foretaste of a *post* experience" (Ibid., p. 420).

⁴⁰¹ For example, some of the rules are listed on the website of the Cathedral of Intercession of the Most Holy Theotokos in Minsk. <http://pokrovhram.by/index.php?id=7>, last accessed 7 March 2017. For examples of notes in a Baptist church see section 5.2. Content of a traditional Baptist worship service.

formed and evangelical Christian Baptist public worship shaped.

4.3. Political context and the formation of the traditional Baptist worship service

4.3.1. Persecution and harassment

The origin and spread of the evangelical movement in the Russian Empire took place within a context of hostility, animosity and opposition from the state and the Russian Orthodox Church leading to severe persecution and oppression of evangelical Christians.⁴⁰² Under Konstantin Pobedonostsev's⁴⁰³ leadership, a resolution of the Second All-Russian [Orthodox] Missionary Congress in 1891 stated:

The rapid growth of sectarianism is a serious danger for the state. All sectarians should be prohibited from leaving their place of residence. All trespasses against the Orthodox Church should be brought to a religious court and not to a secular one. Passports of sectarians should be marked in a special way so that nobody would employ them or let them live until life becomes unbearable for them in Russia. Their children should be removed from them and be trained in an Eastern Orthodox faith.⁴⁰⁴

The years from 1882 to 1905, and especially from 1894 to 1896 which were known as the period of "Pobedonostsev's persecution," were extremely hard on evangelical Christians. Articles which were added to the criminal code enabled punishment for leaving the Orthodox Church and especially for the spread of "heretical" or sectarian doctrines. As a result, several prominent pioneers of the evangelical movement were arrested and banished, notably Nikita Voronin,⁴⁰⁵ Vasiliy Pavlov, Ivan Riaboshapka,⁴⁰⁶ and Vasiliy Ivanov. Moreover, Evangelicals often experienced violence and mocking from the local population, and authorities usually did

⁴⁰² See State Acts Governing the Life of Evangelical Believers in the Russian Empire, http://anabaptist.ru/obmen/hystory/ist1/files/books/book_002/0060_t.html, last accessed 16 May 2019; *Polnoe sobranie zakonov rossiiskoy imperii* [Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire] Collection 3. V. III (Saint-Peterburg, 1886), <http://nauka-i-religia.narod.ru/religioved/garadga/docum.html>, last accessed 10 November 2012; V.I. Yasevich-Borodayevskaya, *Bor'ba za veru* [Fighting for the Faith] (Saint-Peterburg, 1912).

For more details on the Mission Congresses of the Russian Orthodox Church and the mission witness of Baptists in the Orthodox Context, see Parush R. Parushev, "Mission as established presence and prophetic witness in culturally Orthodox Contexts," in *Evangelical Mission in the Eastern European Orthodox Contexts: Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine*, ed. Mihai Malancea and Vladimir Ubeivolc (Chişinău, Moldova: Universitatea Divitia Gratiae, 2013): 57-111. For a general study of church-state relationship in the USSR see Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment In Russia* (London: Macmillan, 1968).

⁴⁰³ Konstantin Pobedonostsev (1827-1907) was a Russian statesman, writer, translator, and church historian. In 1880-1905 he held the position of Attorney-General of the Holy Synod, which was the highest authority of the church-state administration of the Russian church during the period from 1721 to 1917.

⁴⁰⁴ Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost'*, pp. 243-244.

⁴⁰⁵ Nikita Isaevich Voronin (1840-1905) became famous as the first Russian Baptist person in the territory of the Russian Empire. The date of his baptism on the river Kura in Tiflis, August 20, 1867, became the birthday of the Russian Baptist movement. (Mitrokhin, *Khristianstvo. Slovar'*, p. 90.)

⁴⁰⁶ Ivan Grigor'evich Riaboshapka (1831 - 1900) was one of the pioneers of the evangelical revival in the Ukraine.

not attempt to protect them.⁴⁰⁷ The savage waves of violence abated after Nicholas II published a “Decree On Toleration” on 4 March 1905.⁴⁰⁸ But after the beginning of the war with Germany in 1914, the situation deteriorated, as evangelical believers in unoccupied Russian territories were accused of communicating with the Germans.⁴⁰⁹ Religious freedom came only after the February revolution of 1917, which evangelicals greeted with great enthusiasm.⁴¹⁰ Then, after the Bolsheviks came to power, the first Constitution of July 1918 stated that “the right to religious and anti-religious propaganda is recognized for all citizens.”⁴¹¹ Early Bolshevik policy was supportive of the Evangelicals’ struggle for religious freedom,⁴¹² but the communist policy toward them soon changed. “Sectarrians” began to be accused of counter-revolutionary activity, of opposition to the cultural revolution, and of ties with western imperialists.⁴¹³ The Antireligious Commission, established by the Politburo of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on October 19, 1922, began to make provisions in order to limit Baptist and Evangelical Christian activity, and stressed the necessity for a “rapid increase in the decomposition of sectarianism.”⁴¹⁴ Persecution mechanisms slowly began to accelerate. Anti-religious literature was produced on a large scale.⁴¹⁵ In 1925 an all-union anti-religious society “Sojuz bezbozhnikov” (Union of Atheists) was established, which in 1929 was renamed “Soyuz voinstvuyushchikh bezbozhnikov” (the Union of Militant Atheists),⁴¹⁶ and the children’s anti-

⁴⁰⁷ Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptism i Baptisty*, p. 20. In fact, the authorities were trying to make the life of sectarians in Russia unbearable (Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost*, pp. 243-244).

⁴⁰⁸ Ukaz Ob Ukreplenii Nachal Verotepimosti 1905. [Decree on Making Toleration foundation Stronger 1905]. This decree recognized that falling away from the Orthodox faith and espousing other Christian faith or doctrine should not be subject to prosecution. Parents were allowed to raise their children under fourteen years of age in their faith. Some opportunities emerged for the construction of houses of prayer and for the legal ministry of the leadership of the communities. Dr. James L. Heizer, who gained a PhD at the University of Kentucky on the subject of the cult of Stalin in 1929-1939, also studied the reign of Nicholas II and he believed that his Decree on Toleration was intended to favor Old Believers rather than evangelical Christians. Evangelicals and Baptists may have been only the indirect beneficiaries of the decree. (Personal letter to author, 31 August 2012.)

⁴⁰⁹ See V.N. Linkevich, *Mezhkonfessional'nye Otnoshenia v Belarusi (1861 – 1914gg.)* [Interdenominational Relationships in Belarus (1861 – 1914)] (Grodno: Grodnenskiy gosudarstvennyy universitet im. Y. Kupaly, 2008), p. 56.

⁴¹⁰ “Tserkov’ dolzhna ostavat’sya tserkov’yu. Neobratimye desyatiletia: 1917-1937 gody v istorii evangel’skogo i baptistskogo dvizhenii” [The Church Must Remain the Church. Irreversible Decades: 1917-1937 years in the History of Evangelical and Baptist movements]. Documentary material about the history of Baptist Church in Russia (Mezhdunarodnyy sovet tserkvei evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov: Istoriko-analitichesky otdel, 2007), pp. 5-6.

⁴¹¹ The Soviet Constitution of 1918, Part 2, Chapter 5, Clause 13.

⁴¹² Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptizm i Baptisty*, p. 22.

⁴¹³ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴¹⁴ Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost*, p. 362.

⁴¹⁵ See Y. Glan, *Antireligioznaya literatura za 12 let (1917-1929)* [Anti-religious literature for 12 years (1917-1929)] (Moskva: “Bezbozhnik,” 1930). The list of childrens’ books alone had sixty-seven titles. The whole list (occasionally with brief notes in one or three sentences about the contents of a certain book) had as many as two hundred and thirty-four pages. As Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev noted, its quality did not match the quantity: “Soviet literature on the anti-religious propaganda is at a very low intellectual level and is aesthetically intolerable according to its style -- this is the lowest kind of literature in Soviet Russia” (N.A. Berdyaev, *Sochineniya* [Essays] (Moskva: Raritet, 1994), p. 389).

⁴¹⁶ The word “bezbozhnik” (“atheist” or, literally, “godless”) became a popular term and was used in various spheres. A “Bezbozhnik” aircraft, “Bezbozhnik” tank and “Voinstvuyushchiy [militant] bezbozhnik” submarines

religious movement became “the Young Militant Atheists Organization.”⁴¹⁷ Evangelical Christians soon felt the heavy hand of the Communist Party on their shoulders. Houses of prayer were closed and remodeled into schools, clubs, kindergartens, cinemas, anti-religion museums, collective farm canteens, barns, and archives, amongst other things.⁴¹⁸ Christians of all denominations experienced severe repression, especially from 1929 to 1937, when many ministers, including Orthodox priests, and church members were arrested, killed or banished as “enemies of the nation.”⁴¹⁹ Evangelical churches remember the execution of Christians, especially in the purge of 1937, in the following song:

You will not find their names in statistic data,
Nor are their relics found in museums.
What is left after them is the bright light
Of their great deeds as an example to follow.
You will not find a path to their graves
In the midst of taiga and the Ural Mountains.
At these graves, you will see no flowers
Laid by their friends' caring hands.⁴²⁰

Church historian Dmitry Pospelovsky believes that Belarus had a special place in Soviet political history as it officially became the first completely atheistic Soviet republic.⁴²¹ The attempts to fight religion were obvious. There were no functioning evangelical churches in the Soviet (Eastern) part of Belarus by the end of 1937, and not a single church had been opened throughout the entire Minsk region by the time of the Nazi occupation in 1941.⁴²²

During the Second World War persecution in the Soviet Union weakened because the country needed support from every possible group, including religious groupings.⁴²³ In July 1941 the publication of the magazine *Bezbozhnik* (Atheist) was canceled.⁴²⁴ In Minsk, at the beginning

were built. High-powered atheist work teams were opened in kolkhozes and factories. See M.Y. Krapivin, *Nepriidumannaya tserkovnaya Istoriya: vlast' i tserkov' v Sovetskoy Rossii (oktyabr' 1917-go – konets 1930-kh godov)* [True church history: power and the Church in Soviet Russia (October 1917 - late 1930s)] (Volgograd: Peremena, 1997), p. 196.

⁴¹⁷ The Union of Militant Atheists ceased its activity in 1947 to be replaced by the All-Union Society on Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge (the “Knowledge” Society). In 2008 a Union of Militant Atheists of the Russian Federation was established as an heir of the Union of Militant Atheists of the USSR in order to fight religion in the Russian Federation. It states its task as uniting people for the active, systematic and consistent fight against religion in all its forms and kinds, since religion is considered to be a brake on the socialist and cultural revolution. See the Union web-page: <http://svb.net.ru/>, last accessed 24 June 2014.

⁴¹⁸ “Tserkov' dolzhna ostavat'sya tserkov'yu,” p. 30.

⁴¹⁹ *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristijan-baptistov v SSSR*, pp. 221-228.

⁴²⁰ “Protiv tserkvi vozdvignut val” [They Build an Earthfill to Fight against the Church], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 999, second stanza and refrain.

⁴²¹ Dmitry Pospelovsky, “Stalin i tserkov': “konkordat” 1943 i zhizn' tserkvi” [Stalin and the Church: The “Concordat” of 1943, and the Life of the Church], *Continent* (2000): 223.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, p. 103. The persecutions included the Orthodox among other groups. According to D.V. Pospelovsky at the end of 1936 only 11% of the Orthodox “cult buildings” were functioning in contrast to the days before the Revolution in Belarus, and 28.5% in the USSR. (D. V. Pospelovsky, *Russkaya pravoslavnaya tserkov' v XX veke* [Russian Orthodox Church in the 20th century] (Moskva: “Izdatel'stvo espublika,” 1995), p. 167.)

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 185-189.

⁴²⁴ Orthodox encyclopedia under the editorship of Cyrill, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia. On-line version,

of the occupation, Pavel Ivanovich Laguta began to bring together the scattered Baptists and Evangelical Christians and hold Bible studies, and subsequently to start meetings in the area of the present Bicycle Plant. Laguta was assisted by Anton Mitrofanovich Ketsko and other brothers in faith.⁴²⁵

On October 26-29, 1944, Evangelical Christians and Baptists established one Union and in 1945 began publishing the Union's official magazine *Bratskiy Vestnik*.⁴²⁶ During the war and after it many Christians who had fallen away as a result of persecution, returned to church. The Soviet authorities allowed the registration of a third (1,696) of five thousand Baptist congregations.⁴²⁷ However, the Council for Religious Affairs, which was established in May 1944, sought to control the church and destroy it from within.⁴²⁸ Anti-religious policy became tougher; Christians in local churches were persecuted. For example, in the village of Rogozno, Brest region in 1949, Kirichun Feodosiy was forcefully relieved of pastoral responsibilities and convicted of anti-Soviet activities. The community of one hundred and nineteen members had their house of prayer closed.⁴²⁹

Later the Soviet government brought down its suppression on all denominations in an attempt to destroy church ministry from outside and from within. The Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults was ordered to "prevent orchestras, choirs and preachers from coming to other houses of prayer," "take measures in order to put an end to 'outreach' among youth and women," and put a stop to such activities as art and music events.⁴³⁰ As recently as 1959, senior pastors in the Soviet Union complied with the requirements to restrict "unhealthy missionary efforts" and to limit the evangelistic potential of worship services.⁴³¹

In 1957 "scientific" atheism replaced "militant" atheism.⁴³² Nikita Khrushchev became famous for de-Stalinization and ending the notorious political purges, but he soon renewed

vol. 4. <http://www.pravenc.ru/text/77798.html>, last accessed 16 May 2019.

⁴²⁵ Reminiscence by V.Y. Kanatush, preacher and writer from Minsk, 23 April 2005.

⁴²⁶ "Vsesoyuznoye soveshchaniye evangel'skikh khristian i baptistov v Moskve s 26 po 29 oktyabrya 1944 g. (Zapisi zasedaniy)" [All-Union Conference of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in Moscow from October 26 to October 29, 1944 (Recordings of Meetings)], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 1 (1945): 11-38.

⁴²⁷ L.M. Alexeeva, *Istoriya inakomysliya v SSSR. Noveishy Period* [History of Heterodoxy in the USSR. The Newest Period] (Vilnius: "Vest", 1992), ch. 11.

⁴²⁸ *Gistoryia Bielarusi* [History of Belarus], vol. 6 (Minsk: Sovremennaya shkola, Ekoperspektiva, 2011), p. 356.

⁴²⁹ NARB, Stock 952, File 1, Case 21, pp. 2, 2a.

⁴³⁰ "Instruktivnoe pis'mo Soveta po delam religioznykh kul'tov" [Letter of instruction of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults] (April 1957), SARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation) Stock R-6991, File 148, p., Case 3, pp. 3-4. (The website of the Russian Association of researchers of religion. <http://www.rusoir.ru/president/works/214/>, last accessed 31 March 2011.

⁴³¹ "Instruktivnoe pis'mo starshim presviteram VSEKhB," §§ 3-4.

⁴³² S.N. Savinskiy, *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov Ukrainy, Rossii, Belorussii. Chast' II (1917-1967)* [History of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. Part II (1917-1967)] (Saint-Peterburg: "Bibliya dlya vsekh," 2001), p. 196. In 1959 they began publication of "Nauka i religia" (Science and Religion) magazine. Its goal was equipping the readers to spread a materialistic worldview.

severe persecution of churches.⁴³³ A poem in an unpublished, hand-written collection of the 1960s describes the atmosphere which prevailed during the Khrushchev years. The author recounts how persecution directly affected his family. He presents suffering as a natural consequence of faith and preaching the Gospel but, at the same time, he also expresses complete assurance that it is true happiness:

We were little kids back then,
 But it is still so vivid in my memory:
 That day our father was taken away from the family
 For telling the truth to people,
 For having a burning heart for God,
 For calling sinners to repentance,
 For fighting a good fight for God's cause
 And proclaiming Christ's death on the cross ...
 A thorny path has now become my portion,
 But I have only found happiness walking this path.
 Just like my dad, courageously and devoutly,
 I want to walk my path in life.

Many Soviet authors published books which accused Christians of “anti-social, sectarian activities,” manifestations of “fanaticism,” and “clandestine activities.”⁴³⁴ Another notable event was the release of the anti-religious motion picture, *Tuchi nad Borskom* (Clouds over Borsk), which portrayed the tragic involvement of a Komsomol girl in a Pentecostal sect until she was nearly killed by ritual sacrifice.⁴³⁵ Another film, *Greshnitsa* (Sinner), displayed the fate of a young girl who was forced to get married by “sectarians” against her will, but who ran away from home, and escaped from religion.⁴³⁶ Motion pictures typically represented evangelical believers as old women whose lives seemed bleak and devoid of all joy, or “sectarians” who were fanatical zealots. At work and in school, Evangelicals experienced official and personal insults, oppression, and harassment. Protestant Christians suffered from show trials. For example, Vladimir Kanatush, a preacher of “Golgotha” church in Minsk, was arrested in 1950

⁴³³ In April 1960 a house of prayer was torn down in the village of Rechky, Logishin district, Brest region. NARB, Stock 952, File 3, Case 21, p. 155. In August an extension was demolished in Podoressie community, Starodorozhsky district, Minsk region. (Ibid., pp. 250-251.) In November the Christians of Krasovshchina ECB community, Molodechno district, Minsk region complained that the local authorities “wrenched out the locks, broke down the door, burst in, crushed the furniture in the house of prayer as well as all the worship utensils, threw the curtains from the windows into the mud and smashed the pulpit.” (Ibid., pp. 307-309.)

⁴³⁴ A.V. Belov, *Sekty, sektantstvo, sektanty* [Sects, Sectarianism, Sectarians] (Moskva: “Nauka,” 1978); F. Fedorenko, *Sekty, ikh vera i dela* [Sects, Their Faith and Acts] (Moskva: Political Literature Publisher, 1965); Z.V. Kalinicheva, *Sotsial'naya sushchnost' baptizma* [Social Essence of Baptists] (Leningrad: “Nauka,” 1972); A. Sulackov, *Na iskhode noch* [At the End of Night] (Alma-Ata: “Kazakhstan,” 1966); N.V. Ryabushkin, *Kto takie sektaty* [Who Are Sectarians] (Ivanovo: Ivanovo Publishing House, 1961).

⁴³⁵ Directed by V. Ordynsky (Mosfilm, 1961). See Tatstsyana Kasataya, “Sud nad baptystami”: savetskiya kinastuzhki yak metod barats'by suprats' evangel'skikh khrystsiyan baptystau u BSSR” [The Baptists' Trial: Soviet Movies as a Method of Fighting against Evangelical Christian Baptists in BSSR], in *Yevanhielskaya tsarkva Bielarusi: gistoryya i suchasnasc'. Vypusk II: (da 500-hoddzia Mikalaja Radzivila Chornaha): zbornik materyjalau II Mizhnarodnaj navukova-praktychnaj kanfierentsyi*, ed. A Bokun, pp. 240-251.

⁴³⁶ Directed by F. Philippov (Mosfilm, 1962).

and sentenced to twenty-five years of prison camps, but was released in 1955, after Stalin's death.⁴³⁷ In March 1963 church leaders in Brest were sentenced to three to five years in prison.⁴³⁸ In Zelva, Grodno region, on January 14, 1970, Nikolai Shugalo and Nikolai Lazuta were sentenced to five years in prison as the leaders of the local Baptist community.⁴³⁹ The story of the Vilchynski family is famous in Brest. In 1968 the pastor of an unregistered Baptist community,⁴⁴⁰ Vladimir Vilchynski, was sentenced to five years in prison. In 1979 his daughter Galina, aged 21, was sentenced to three years in prison because she had been teaching Bible lessons. In 1986, Zinaida Yakovlevna, Vladimir's wife, was also arrested for her activity in the Council for Relatives of Prisoners⁴⁴¹ and was sentenced to two years in prison.⁴⁴²

Fortunately, the severity of persecution relaxed somewhat in the first half of Brezhnev's governance (1964-1982).⁴⁴³ Toivo Pilli refers to these years as the "transition period from 'administrative methods' to more 'educational methods,' including sociological arguments

⁴³⁷ Pavel Kanatush, "Svidetelstvo o pape" [Testimony about My Dad], *Krynitsa Zhyttsya*, no. 6 (2010): 24.

⁴³⁸ Their names are Grigoriy Shepetun'ko, Stepan Matveyuk, Ivan Kotovich and Yevgeniy Fedorchuk (A. Gardzienka, *Religijnaya apazitsyya na Belaruskim Pales'si u 1960 - 1980-ya gady. Zagaroddze-3. Materyyaly navukova-kraznaznachay kanferentsyi "Palesse u XX stagoddzi"* [Religious opposition in Belarusian Polesie in 1960-80-ies. Zagaroddze-3. Proceedings of regional research conference "Polesie in the twentieth century"] (Minsk, 2001), p. 222). They were accused of holding illegal prayer meetings at private apartments and of calls to summon an ECB Congress. There were five court cases in Brest. (*Gistoryya Bielarusi*, p. 354.)

⁴³⁹ *Gistoryya Bielarusi*, p. 356. Dzmitry Lazuta, Nikolai Lazuta's grandson, is a pastor of "Light of Truth" Baptist church in Minsk. The Baptist church members' trial in the village of Borodichy, Zelva region, became a basis for the documentary "The Baptists' Trial," which was shot in 1970. For the analysis of the events and the film, see Tatstsyana Kasataya, "The Baptists' Trial: Soviet Movies as a Method of Fighting against Evangelical Christian Baptists in BSSR," pp. 240-251.

⁴⁴⁰ See footnote 26.

⁴⁴¹ The Council for Relatives of Prisoners (1964-1987) was established by the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in order to provide help for imprisoned Christians and their families. See *Vestnik Istiny*, no. 4-5 (2009) dedicated to the 45th anniversary of the Council's ministry. On September 25, 1987, by the decision of the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists a new department was formed under the Council of Churches, named the "Department of Intercession of CC ECB." (*Vestnik Istiny*, no. 3 (2001), pp. 32-33.) See also Walter Sawatsky, a researcher of the Russian-speaking Baptist movement: *Evangelicheskoye dvizheniye v SSSR posle Vtoroy mirovoy voyny* [Evangelical Movement after World War II] (Moskva: Filial Tsentralnogo komiteta mennonitov v Rossii, 1995), p. 396. This work was originally published as *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1981). For a helpful source on the role of women in "unregistered" evangelical communities see N.A. Belyakova and M. Dobson, *Zhenshchiny v evangel'skikh obshchinakh poslevoynnogo SSSR. 1940-1980-ye gg. Issledovaniye i istochniki* [Women in the Evangelical Communities of the Post-War USSR (1940s-1980s). Documents and Analysis] (Moskva: "Indrik," 2015).

⁴⁴² Vil'chinskiy, *Nedarom Prolitye Sliozy*, p. 3.

Other prisoners' names could be mentioned in regard to the 1960s and 1970s. In Dobrush, Gomel region on April 24, 1968, there was a legal trial against the chief "schismatics," who were active in the village of Ut'. These were Tretinnikov Kuz'ma Nikitovich and Abushenko Nina Korneevna. They were prosecuted and condemned. Tretinnikov was sentenced to 3 years and Abushenko to 2 years of work camps. (NARB, Stock 136, File 1, Case 13, pp. 123-132.) On August 15, 1968, there was a court trial against the leaders of Gomel church, Kolesnichenko Mikhail Andreevich, Kozin Nil Petrovich and Frolov Andrey Fedorovich. They were condemned according to article 139 of the Criminal Code of BSSR and sentenced to three years in prison. (*Ibid.*, p. 125.) The list is not exhaustive.

⁴⁴³ On this historical period see Natallya Baltrushevich, "Uzajemadačynienni dzharžavy i pratestanckikh cerkvau u BSSR u 1965-1985 hh." [Mutual Relations of Protestant Churches in the Byelorussian SSR in 1965-1985], in *Yevanhielskaya tsarkva Bielarusi: gistoryya i suchasnasc'. Vypusk II: (da 500-hoddzia Mikalaja Radzivila Chornaha): zbornik materyjalau II Mizhnarodnaj navukova-praktychnaj kanfierentsyi*, ed. A Bokun, pp. 220-237.

against religion.”⁴⁴⁴ However, persecution did not cease until the celebration of the Millenium of the baptism of Kievan Rus'⁴⁴⁵ in 1988. The last prisoner of conscience, Vitaly Boiko, a pastor from Odessa, was only set free in 1989.⁴⁴⁶

When the Soviet system broke up in 1991, evangelical Christians were afforded opportunities which would have been unimaginable earlier. They started holding evangelistic meetings and worship in clubs, houses of culture, stadiums and movie theaters. From September 14, 1992 to December 28, 1994 the religious programs “Golos druga” (Friends’ voice) and “Sutnasts” (Essence) prepared by TWR studio in Brest were broadcast by the first channel of Belarusian radio in prime-time.⁴⁴⁷ Legal opportunities arose for publishing Bibles, song collections, Christian newspapers and magazines and other Christian literature. Dozens of churches and missions were registered. In 1989 Bible courses were begun by Belarussian Baptists, and the Bible Institute, Bible School, and the Seminary were established in 1991, 1993, and in 1997 respectively.⁴⁴⁸ The authorities provided Christians with plots for the construction of houses of prayer, and the “Light of Gospel” and “Bethlehem” houses of prayer were built.⁴⁴⁹ A door was opened for missionaries, teachers and preachers from other countries. However, when the President Alexander Lukashenko consolidated his power, some limitations were put in place. In the opinion of some experts, the law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” (passed on October 31, 2002, no.137-3) impairs Christian freedom of conscience and belief.⁴⁵⁰ Nevertheless in comparison to the Soviet era, the evangelical Christians continue to possess ample opportunities for evangelism and worship.

4.3.2. Motifs of struggle, suffering, and expectation in worship

Constant hostile pressure from outside forces and interference in the life of Christian communities and their ministries during the Tzarist and Soviet eras resulted in a particular type of worship which was based on the opposition to and separation from “the world”. The emphasis on the idea of struggle, on a willingness to suffer for the faith, and on eschatology illustrate, for example, the nature of the conflict between these churches and the world. Sermons, songs and poems often stressed that one must fight against the world and against the flesh, and strive for

⁴⁴⁴ Pilli, “Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Estonia: The Shaping of Identity, 1945-1991,” p. 49.

⁴⁴⁵ Kievan Rus’ is an ancient state in eastern Slavic lands which shaped the Old Russian language, culture and people.

⁴⁴⁶ *Logos: The Bible, Education, Music*, no. 1(13) (2005), p. 8.

⁴⁴⁷ Since 1991 I have been involved in broadcast ministry in Brest as an author of some broadcasts and the Chairman of the Board of Trans World Radio in Belarus (official website. <http://twr.fm.>, last accessed 16 May 2019.

⁴⁴⁸ Since 1997 I have been involved in the Seminary's work as an Academic Dean and (since 2010) as the Rector. Minsk Theological Seminary, official website, <http://www.mbseminary.org.>, last accessed 16 May 2019.

⁴⁴⁹ “Light of Gospel” church in Minsk, official website, <http://www.glchurch.by>, last accessed 9 March 2017. “Bethlehem” church in Minsk, official website, <http://iisus.by/o-tserkvi/история>, last accessed 16 May 2019.

⁴⁵⁰ See discussion in the minutes of the Council of the ECB Union in Belarus, no. 59 (30 October 2002) and no. 60 (18-19 December 2002), Minsk, Belarus.

salvation. One of the popular songs assumed a similar sense of fierce struggle and suffering as in the time of the early church, and challenged Christians to continue spreading the Good News:

All along the thorny way of suffering,
We see bloody traces and stains -
It is the first Christians walking here,
Who showed a great act of love.
The storm of evil could not put out
Their holy heavenly flame,
And the old grey-haired men
Brought it to us through many trials.
 They preserved it but lost many brethren
 During the years of relentless fighting.
 Now they call on us, the young and strong,
 To join them and fill in these losses.
 If we are ready to give up our lives
 For the great cause of our ministry,
 God calls us to join without delay
 His army of salvation volunteers.
We will take the flags of Christ's teaching
From their weakening hands
And carry this light of truth in the darkness
Through ages and generations.
Our path may be full of hardships,
But soon the Sun of eternity will rise for us -
Our happiness will be revealed, outside this troubled life,
In the reign of truth and much-desired freedom.⁴⁵¹

Baptists especially responded to idealism in songs which summoned them to “holy war.” These texts often included such military terminology as feat, trial, struggle, sacrificing life, army, banners, victory, and battle. Two popular hymns of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists perhaps illustrate how ideas of struggle influenced worship. A hymn written by Prokhanov served as a *sui generis* hymn of the evangelical brotherhood during the first third of the twentieth century and it is still used to the present day. Unfortunately, the written text is not able to convey all the expressive dynamics such as the explicit march beat.

For evangelical faith
And for Christ we will stand up;
Following His example,
Forward all, forward after Him.
 It is a fierce battle and a devastating fire,
 Which make the earth shudder;
 Hold up your flag,
 The banner of the victorious Christ.
A closely knit and joyous family,
His united people,
Having one heart and one soul
Onward, you who follow Christ!⁴⁵²

⁴⁵¹ “Nyne Bozh'ya lyubov' obnimayet” [Now God's Love Embraces], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 716, second–fourth stanzas.

⁴⁵² “Za evangel'skuyu veru” [For Evangelical Faith], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 185, first, second stanzas and

Another “militaristic” text was written by Nikolai Khrapov, who was arrested five times and spent more than twenty-eight years in prisons and camps, where he eventually died. This poem, which became a song, was addressed primarily to young people. Singing these and similar hymns spiritually united twentieth-century Christians with those early believers who also worshiped in secret. All had to be ready to enter the arena in face of the fear of bloodthirsty lions or martyrdom:

We greet you, Christ's blossoming people,
 Born in storms by the great destiny,
 The end times come to you with a threatening face,
 They call you for the last decisive battle!
 The steel wall of troops is set against us -
 It is unbelief fighting against us fiercely.
 Let us close up our file,
 Young soldiers, keep up in this decisive battle!
 Sound the victory! May the holy flame burn more brightly over the ruins of evil!
 Bring forth the Christian banner
 Of unselfish love and Christ's goodness!⁴⁵³

A somewhat unusual example may be added to the songs cited above. This was an alteration of the text of “The International,” the international proletarian anthem which became the anthem of the Soviet state from 1918 until 1944. This revised text was not widely spread, but it is known that it was sung in the Slavgorod district, Mogilev region,⁴⁵⁴ and Kobrin district, Brest region.⁴⁵⁵ Evangelical Christians replaced the fight against “the international bourgeoisie” with the struggle against sin and evil, which can be defeated by the blood of Christ.

Arise, oh world steeped in sin,
 The world of the hungry and slaves
 Arise and fight for your life,
 You will fight for life or death.
 The whole world of violence will pass away,
 It will be destroyed to the ground and then
 Love and truth will reign
 And there will be no evil at all.⁴⁵⁶

Such struggle required complete determination, selfless devotion, and firmness to the end. There could be no easy way to victory and song lyrics warned about the possibility of

refrain.

⁴⁵³ “Privet vam, Khristovo tsvetushcheye plemya” (We Greet You, Christ's Blossoming People), *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 718, first-third stanzas.

⁴⁵⁴ D. Khaytun and P. Kapayevich, *Suchasnaye sektantstva na Belarusi* [Modern Sectarianism in Belarus] (Mensk: Belaruskae dzyarzhhaunae vydavetstva, 1929), p. 48. This details the situation of Christians in the village of Urech'e, Propoyisk (nowadays Slavgorodsky) district, Mogilev region.

⁴⁵⁵ Alexander Firisiuk, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 22 April 2011 (Personal notes, p. 59).

⁴⁵⁶ *The International*, first stanza (Khaytun and Kapayevich, *Suchasnaye sektantstva na Belarusi*, p. 48).

martyrdom. Life with Christ, even risking martyrdom, appeared to be the best option because even dying for Christ is was better than living without Him.

May young hearts sound in unison
At Christ's bosom today!
Tomorrow a furious crowd may as well lift someone
And nail them to the cross!⁴⁵⁷

Other popular songs also called for self-sacrifice, self-denial, and dedication.

Living for Jesus,
Dying with Him,
Can there be a better life than this?
It is worth humbling oneself for,
It is worth fighting for,
It is worth giving up your life for.⁴⁵⁸

We have few concerns of our own,
But let us not be preoccupied by them.
We should sacrifice our forces
Not for ourselves, but for others.
 Oh fresh youth, the spring of life!
 Do not spare forces and health (for people),
 Keep your spirit burning for the Lord (more and more).⁴⁵⁹

The frequent use of military language in hymnody demonstrates how Baptists expressed a dualistic perception of the world. There existed only darkness or light, black or white. The world with its culture and political order was seen as hostile towards citizens of the kingdom of heaven, and it was ready to use any opportunity to destroy believers. Believers must not become involved with the world because it could not be changed, transformed, improved, or corrected; they could only fight against it. One's culture and one's way of life must oppose the world, and then the victory, although it may cost one's life, would be won.

Opposition to the world, the struggle with sin, and separation from the world led naturally to suffering. Although evangelicals believed that the Lord sometimes sent peaceful and quiet times⁴⁶⁰ they often quoted another text from the Second Epistle to Timothy, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."⁴⁶¹ "The way the true church chooses," as a member of an "unregistered" church preached, "contains suffering, the catacombs, amphitheaters, fires, torture, and prison. It remains the same until now and for those who love

⁴⁵⁷ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 718, fourth stanza.

⁴⁵⁸ "Zhit' dlya Iisusa, s Nim umirat" (Living for Jesus, Dying with Him), *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 287, first stanza.

⁴⁵⁹ "Poka ogon' lyubvi chudesnoy" (While the Fire of a Wonderful Love), *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 720, fourth stanza and refrain.

⁴⁶⁰ 2 Tim. 2:2.

⁴⁶¹ 2 Tim. 3:12.

the Lord it is pleasing, beautiful, because it leads to eternal life.”⁴⁶²

To a certain degree one could even speak of a “psychology of martyrdom”⁴⁶³ or a “cult of the Way of the Cross,”⁴⁶⁴ which remains in evidence even at the present time in reading magazines or attending worship services of the ICCECB churches. The appeal to suffering constantly feeds the spirit of worship and the faith of believers who continue to speak about persecution taking place in their churches, who continue to send information about persecution, fines, bans from the authorities, and to read these aloud at public meetings. A typical example occurred during a meeting of an ICCECB church, where information of a fine imposed on one of the churches of the Brest region was presented, along with news of persecution of believers in Turkmenistan.⁴⁶⁵

A positive attitude toward suffering can be attributed to several factors. First, there is a strong belief in retribution and that a special glory awaits those suffering for their faith. Second, the suffering and persecution serve as confirmation of being chosen to follow the narrow path because evil forces always oppose truth. This theme resembles Shtundist preaching from as early as the 1880s which argued that “if Shtundism was not the true, holy faith, it would not have been subjected to harassment, and the early days of Christianity would not have resumed.”⁴⁶⁶ Third, suffering for righteousness is seen to increase one’s faith and bring the faithful closer to God. “Every difficulty,” Karev proclaimed, “is a breeze which drives us towards the harbor of Christ.” A good example of the desire and pleasure in suffering was narrated by a preacher in the “Light of Gospel” Church in Minsk on November, 13, 2008.

A brother was in jail in the 1930s. He was often called in for questioning, and at the end of the questioning he always thanked the investigator. “Thank you for allowing me to suffer for Christ.” He was transferred to another cell with the worst conditions of life, and he again thanked the authorities: “Thanks, now I can testify about Christ to new people.” His term in prison was extended by four years, and he commented on this: “Thank you, I have several more years to suffer for my Lord.”⁴⁶⁷

Suffering, however, is not presented as hopeless. Although “life is always good, even in suffering,”⁴⁶⁸ other songs and poems reflect that the Lord alleviates suffering and that all suffering is a foretaste of the coming joy. One section of the hymnal is entitled “Consolation for the Sick, Suffering, and Prisoners,” while another section is devoted to “Christian Joy.” When

⁴⁶² S.N. Misiruk, “Tserkov’ Khrista – eto maloe stado...” [The Church of Christ is a Little Folk...], *Vestnik Istiny*, no. 2 (1996): 2-3.

⁴⁶³ Nikol’skaya, “Uroki istorii dlya EChB,” p. 10.

⁴⁶⁴ Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost’*, p. 446.

⁴⁶⁵ Personal visit of the author to the church service, Church of ICCECB in Minsk, 9 September 2007 (Personal notes, p. 59b).

⁴⁶⁶ Rozhdestvensky, *Yuzhnorussky Shtundism*, p. 83.

⁴⁶⁷ “Light of Gospel,” Minsk, 13 November 2008 (Personal notes, p. 59). See also the title of the hymn “Yest’ radost’ v tom, chtob lyudi nenavideli” [There Could Be Joy When People Hate You], *Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 815, first stanza.

⁴⁶⁸ “Kogda odoleyut tebya ispytan’ya” [When Trials Prevail against You], *Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 553.

announcing a hymn for singing, a worship leader often begins with the words: “For our encouragement let us sing hymn no. ...,” or “let us be encouraged by singing the hymn...” Direct encouragement during worship is in mind, but it is assumed that the encouragement will also accompany the believers after the meeting closes. Particularly popular in terms of comfort are hymns such as “Kogda odoleyut tebya ispytan'ya” (When Trials Prevail against You), “Techet li zhizn' mirno, podobno reke,” (If Life Goes Smoothly Like a River), “Ty moy Bog Svyatoy” (You are My Holy God),⁴⁶⁹ which express confidence in God’s consolation and protection in the different circumstances of life.

The key moment of comfort is to become like Christ during the sufferings, which is expressed in a Russian saying “Christ has suffered and told us to do so.” This idea is voiced by the following poem:

I am the Teacher and God,
I have travelled all this way,
Are my disciples greater than Me?
If I walked this thorny path to Calvary,
It means that you will have to walk it, too.⁴⁷⁰

Attention to struggle, suffering, and social protest against the ungodly system naturally results in a strong eschatological emphasis. This would be reflected in a significant interest in the book of Revelation, prophecies, the millennium, and questions around the subjects of the “end of the world,” the Second Coming, the end of suffering and the victory of Christ and those on His side. It is interesting to note that the first books of native Baptist authors published in Belarus after the beginning of *perestroika* were *The Mystery of the Apocalypse* by Vladimir Kanatush and *Prophecy of the Bible* by Pavel Makarevich.⁴⁷¹ Eschatological charge was expressed in the work of evangelical believers as demonstrated in a poem by Galina Vezikova which was popular in the 1980s and 1990s:

Do you want to be taken to heaven? –
I want so much to shake the earthly dust off my feet
And step into eternity with the hope that all troubles end.⁴⁷²

It was during the times of persecution that an eschatological aspect was expressed most powerfully, envisioning Christians as aliens in the world, longing for life in heaven:

I am an alien here; this is a strange country to me,

⁴⁶⁹ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, nos. 553, 707, 789.

⁴⁷⁰ The poem “Khristianinu” [To a Christian], *Stikhotvoreniya, declamatsii, istorii*, first and second verses.

⁴⁷¹ *Taina Apokalipsisa* (Minsk: “Probuzhdenie,” 1993) and *Prorochestva Biblii* (Minsk: 1993).

⁴⁷² <http://www.blagovestnik.org/books/00430/db/v838593.html>, last accessed 16 May 2019.

And everything is strange to my soul.
I long, with all my soul, for the vast sweep of heaven,
A better, brighter and lighter place.⁴⁷³

Convinced that many signs indicated that Christ would soon return suddenly and without further warning, preachers would appeal to each person with exhortations. However, waiting and longing for Christ's return introduced a certain kind of optimism and hope into the worship services of the persecuted. It was joyful for worshippers to realize in the midst of persecution and oppression that there is a place without evil, where injustice and animosity would be replaced with eternal love.

We face our future with hope and joy,
Your soul will find rest only there.
You will forget things of the past and come to your heavenly home,
You will come to your heavenly home, this wonderful place.⁴⁷⁴

4.3.3. The way of preparation and presentation

The influence of persecution in worship could be seen in other aspects of the worship service, including the quality of content and the ways of presentation. For example, because of the difficulties in acquiring higher education,⁴⁷⁵ not to mention a theological one, the isolation of the theological community from the West, the lack of Bible dictionaries, reference books, and commentaries, interpretation of the Bible by an allegoric method or spiritualization flourished. Preachers did not have resources for good historical-grammatical text analysis, and so searching for allegory and hidden meaning within the text was the preferred method. Preachers omitted historical context and instead would immediately apply the truth to the life of their audience. Below is an interesting example of how the text from Luke 2:43-44 would be applied. All details have direct relation to everyday life.

Mary and Joseph lost Jesus. What does this fact tell us about? Undoubtedly, we can easily do the same in our fuss, concerns, tedious thoughts, misunderstandings in life, indignation filling us when we do not understand God's will, when everything in us is against God, because His direction does not correspond to our desires, or as we think, our needs. Young people lose Jesus even easier! Running after joys of this life, its satisfactions they aim only at one thing – the satisfaction of their desires. In this situation Jesus disappears and leaves their life. Jesus is not lost immediately, but gradually. Most of human fallings are also done gradually, not at once.

Mary and Joseph started looking for Jesus not where he could have been found... But there is only one place in the world where you can and should look for him, and you will certainly find him there. It is the church! This place is his saved church! And how can you find him there? The only way is through holy repentance.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷³ "Ya zdes' ne svoy" [I Am an Alien Here], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya. Sbornik dukhovnyh gimnov i pesen evangel'skih tserkvey s notami, tom 1* [Song of Revival. Collection of spiritual hymns and songs of the Evangelical Churches with music] (Samohvalovich: ODO "Dubki," 2006), no. 1146.

⁴⁷⁴ "Zachem stradat', moy drug, zachem grustit' poroy?" [Why Should You Suffer, My Friend, Why Should You Be Sad At Times?], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 780, fifth stanza.

⁴⁷⁵ See footnotes 144, 147.

⁴⁷⁶ Georgiy Adamovich, "Poteryanny Khristos" [Lost Christ], *Krynitsa Zhyttsya*, no. 1 (1995): 43-46.

As a result of bans against theological education and the publication of theological literature, the idea of intuitive knowledge emerged as superior to analytical thinking, as a person could receive this without the help of dictionaries, encyclopaedias, or commentaries. Since “the Holy Spirit directly reveals the knowledge of truth,” then the historical, cultural, and contextual analyses do not seem to play an important role in comparison to spiritual preparation, especially prayer and meditation.⁴⁷⁷ This understanding continues to flourish, despite the fact that modern preachers have many reference books at their disposal. This fact indicates that this approach is only partially explained by the context; indeed, it could be argued that it is inherent in the Baptist method of reading the Bible – as McClendon notes in what he describes as the ‘baptist vision’.⁴⁷⁸

In so far as most preachers had only a Bible and a concordance, they often preached topical sermons. Before studying at Moscow Theological Seminary, I myself followed this pattern with mostly thematic or textual preaching on “Love,” “Fear,” “Hope,” “Freedom,” “Forgiveness,” or sermons on Jesus’ parables or miracles but not in a series.

Spatial limitations also often influenced the form of public worship. The small space in private houses did not allow for a stage, or pulpit, and often preachers preached holding the Bible in their hands from where they sat. The lack of space in small houses of prayer limited opportunities for having a large choir. Less importance was given to external aspects of public worship. Beautiful robes for choirs, for example, were an unknown phenomenon.

However, persecution could not stop the development of the worship service. For example, an unregistered church in Brest developed its activities with even more energy than many registered communities.⁴⁷⁹ There were Sunday school classes for children which, of course, were illegal; there were rehearsals for a brass band for playing and singing; and special youth services.⁴⁸⁰ Interestingly, public worship during the pre-*perestroika* period could allow for greater diversity because the shortage of printed songbooks indirectly encouraged creativity of

⁴⁷⁷ Inevitable subjectivity in such cases is compensated by the authority of the brotherhood, older brothers, or traditions. For a negative evaluation of this phenomenon, see Cherenkov, *Evropeis'ka reformatsiya ta ukrains'kiy evangel's'kiy protestantizm*, p. 318; Alexander Negrov, “Hermeneutics in Transition: Three Hermeneutical Horizons of Slavic Evangelicals in the Post-Soviet Period,” *Bogoslovskie razmyshleniya* [Theological Reflections], no. 4 (2004): 40.

⁴⁷⁸ McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 26-34.

⁴⁷⁹ In May 1960 the house of prayer in Shirokaya street was torn down and on November 5, 1960 the Council on the Religious Groups Affairs in BSSR canceled church registration. They suggested the Christians in Brest join a Baptist community in the village Voolka Podgorodskaya, which is three kilometers away from the city. (*Gistoryya Bielarusi*, p. 354.) In fact, the house of prayer in Voolka was not big and it could not meet the needs of Christians. See footnote 615.

⁴⁸⁰ See interview with a pastor Vladimir Klopot, “Bozh'e voditelstvo” [God's guidance], *Gost'* [Guest], no 5-6 (2014): 16. I was a member of this church from 1987-1991 and personally met many eyewitnesses of the events described. For further information on the history of Brest ECB church in Fortechynaya, see the material provided by the church deacon, Stepan Pekun: “Krestnyy put' Brestskoy tserkvi YEKHB” [The Way of the Cross of Brest ECB Church], *Krynitsa Zhyttsya*, no. 2 (1997): 23-26; “Krestnyy put' Brestskoy tserkvi YEKHB” [The Way of the Cross of Brest ECB Church], *Krynitsa Zhyttsya*, no. 3 (1997): 14-19.

church members and led to the creation and use of hand-written songbooks, even if the quality was not always high. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, churches had fully provided themselves with the *Collection of Christian Hymns* and *Song of Revival*. The collection is now considered to be the musical canon in traditional churches.⁴⁸¹ Many collections of poems have been published, and these publications contributed to the unification of worship in churches, at the expense of decreased local creativity.

The end of persecution has led to a lesser emphasis on the idea of struggle against the world, and a decrease in tension of chiliastic expectations or motifs of suffering. Although older preachers attempt to call attention to the struggle with the world and the flesh, there is a general shift in preaching toward spiritual growth, purity, ethics and Christian character, appeals to good works, Bible reading, attending services and, especially, praying and participating in the ministry of the church.⁴⁸² However, the leadership of traditional churches is mostly composed of people who experienced persecution, and it is they who determine the orientation of worship services in large and influential churches such as “Golgotha” and “Light of Gospel” churches in Minsk, the central Baptist church in Kobrin, churches on Fortechhnaya 61/1, Voolka, and “Christmas” in Brest, the church in Man'kovichi, Brest region along with Slutsk and Soligorsk, Minsk region, and others.

As a result of evangelism after *perestroika* a considerable number of new people have joined the congregations, especially in the large churches in the cities, but they are not yet likely to hold leadership roles. First, they would not be regarded to have met the requirements of maturity and stability in their spiritual life. Second, they do not have sufficient support in the already existing structure. Third, some are barred due to family problems in the past: in Baptist churches, at least until 2017, divorced and/or remarried people could not be ordained. It is not surprising, therefore, that the spirit of the worship service along with theological-ideological basis and influence of the Orthodox environment reflects the difficult history of survival and struggle for evangelical Christians, and that this attitude is passed on to their children and the new generations of converts. Historical connections and context have also shaped worship practice, worship structure, content, and temporal and spatial characteristics, factors that are addressed in the fifth chapter.

⁴⁸¹ Some churches provide almost all their participants and guests with songbooks. These contain only lyrics. Songbooks with sheet music are used by musicians and choir singers. Since the same songs have been sung in churches for many years, everybody knows the tunes by heart.

⁴⁸² QM, 2012. My personal experience and visits to churches would corroborate this statement.

PART II. AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRACTICE OF TRADITIONAL WORSHIP

CHAPTER 5. GENERAL STRUCTURE, CONTENT, TIME, AND SPACE OF WORSHIP

Introduction

The following two sections seek to provide a thick description⁴⁸³ of a regular worship service and a service which includes the celebration of the Lord's Supper.⁴⁸⁴

*Service in church on Fortechnaya 61/1, Brest, December 14, 2008*⁴⁸⁵

Sunday morning worship starts at 10.00. Many show up twenty to thirty minutes earlier and park their car in a church parking lot. Some of the people are picked up by a church bus and some walk from the nearest bus station. People come in small groups or families to the house of prayer and take their seats in the sanctuary. Most people flood into the sanctuary in the last ten minutes before worship starts. In general sisters take their seats to the left of the central aisle and brothers go to the right. Nevertheless, some couples sit together at the “male” row. The families with small children are in the balcony; there are many young people there and there is no gender segregation. The ordinary members do not take their coats off. There is a small check-room at the basement; choir and preachers make use of it. Married women and elderly ladies wear headscarves, although the headwear of some is inconspicuous. Some walk towards their seat and keep standing, praying silently. It is not until later that they take their seats in order to talk to a neighbour or just wait for the worship to start. By three minutes before the worship is due to begin, the sanctuary is filled with three to four hundred Christians. There are slightly more women than men. The people sit tightly together but there are some spare seats on the first two rows in front of the pulpit. There are two people in wheel-chairs in the central aisle.

Ministers and preachers gather in the basement in the “brothers’ room” ten to twenty

⁴⁸³ On thick description see Clifford Geertz, “Thick descriptions toward an interpretive theory of culture,” in *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays* by Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3-30. Such ethnographic description has three characteristics: “it is interpretive; what it is interpretive of is the flow of social discourse; and the interpreting involved consists in trying to rescue the “said” of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fix it in perusable terms.” (Ibid., p. 13.)

⁴⁸⁴ I know these churches very well, as I was a member of the first church from 1987-1993 and have continued to visit it regularly. I have also attended worship services in “Golgotha” church several times, so in general I am familiar with the context. When describing these worship services, I am relying on my personal participation and observation. I have reviewed the videos of worship, which people made at my request to make the most of visual and auditory functions, several times and I also talked with some participants to clarify the details, especially regarding the preparation and holding of the Lord's Supper.

⁴⁸⁵ See Appendix 3.1.1.

minutes before worship starts. Here they clarify who is going to preach (if there are no guests, according to the previously approved schedule); then they get on their knees and some of them pray. Following that, the brothers go to another room in the basement, where the choir is already waiting for them. The pastor clarifies anything related to the choir participation, the choir director asks one of the choir singers to pray, and then the choir members leave the basement on both sides and enter the sanctuary. They are followed by the preachers, and the senior pastor closes the procession. Choir members come to the stage facing the audience. The ministers, dressed in suits and ties, take their seats to the left. There is a pulpit in the left corner of the sanctuary. The piano is located in front of the choir, to the right, and microphones are placed in the center. There is a table on the stage in front of the ministers for Communion.

The senior pastor immediately proceeds to the pulpit and the entire congregation stands up. He opens with a greeting “Peace to you, dear brothers and sisters.” He notes that the Lord has shown His grace, and calls the congregation to prayer. The pastor prays for about one minute, asking for the Holy Spirit’s blessing through singing and the word. He closes with “Amen,” which is unanimously repeated by church members. The pastor announces the number of the hymn for the congregation to sing. The choir members pass hymnals with lyrics only to each other, and people in the congregation open their own hymnals. The pianist plays two lines of the hymn and the choir director gives a sign to start the singing. Many Christians know the hymn by heart and they do not need any text. The singing is harmonious but it is not too emotional: the faces stay solemn and focussed. While the congregation sings, some people running late enter the sanctuary and are guided to seats by the male ushers.

The pastor leaves the pulpit after the hymn and the first preacher comes to the pulpit to begin his sermon with the words “Peace to you, dear brothers and sisters.” He reads Psalm 96 and encourages the church to praise the Lord. Some people open their Bibles and follow the passage. The sermon lasts for about six minutes and the preacher asks everyone to bow down in prayer. The people kneel and most of them bend their heads, clasp their hands and close their eyes. A sister from the congregation is the first one to pray. She praises the Lord for providing all the necessary things, asks for the blessing for the church, for “those who share the Word with the people,” for individuals praying and for non-Christians so that “the Lord may be revealed to them.” The sister prays for about a minute, and then a brother from a congregation takes a little bit longer to pray and thanks the Lord for the opportunity to serve and worship the Lord. When his prayer is over, another brother continues to pray but another sister raises her voice at the same moment. Her voice sounds agitated and stirred, so the brother stops and the sister prays out loud for the pastors, choir, young people (“this young vineyard”) and asks for blessing for the

worship service. Her prayer lasts a little bit over a minute and the second pastor continues. He thanks God for the worship, for good days, for the daily bread, for the house of prayer, and he makes requests for the sick and non-Christians, so that “many people would receive You, the Lord and Savior.” Each person praying concludes with “Amen” and the rest of the people echo “Amen.” The preacher is the last one to pray. He thanks the Lord for His majesty and mercy, for Jesus Christ, and for the essentials in life. He also expresses his desire to glorify the Lord and to witness about Him. Finally, he prays for the rulers to “rule with wisdom”, for the sick, and for the congregation.

After the prayer people get to their feet. Some of them brush their knees. Then everybody takes their seats and listens to the hymn “Do not Despair, the Lord Is Always with You,” which is performed by a solo singer and accompanied by the choir. Immediately after the song sixteen smartly dressed children, ages 3 to 5, with their Sunday school teacher and musician come up to the stage. Seven boys and girls recite short poems (one or two verses). One of the boys is too shy to speak and they pass a microphone to the next one in line. Sometimes it is hard to make out what the children say but it seems that their participation is the most important thing. The adults listen with tenderness, and smile even when they cannot understand what is being said. The teacher prompts the words if the children forget them. The children sing a song accompanied by the piano. The song has a verse repeated, “I am a small sheep, I follow Him through a narrow trail up to Jerusalem.” Eight more children recite poems and one boy sings.

After eight minutes on the stage, the children leave holding hands. A sister from the choir takes her turn to recite an old Chinese story with the theme “Forget about Yourself for the Sake of Others.” She encourages people to imitate Christ, who walked from house to house comforting and supporting people. She concludes with, “Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4). The choir continues the worship by singing about great and marvelous acts of God.

The final preach is by one of the deacons. He begins with the words, “I greet everybody who has gathered at the house of prayer, in the name and love of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The audience stands up and responds, “It is mutual.” Then the brother reads Proverbs 2:1-8 and advises the congregation to seek wisdom from God, as Solomon did. The sermon is preached for twenty-four minutes. The preacher calls on listeners to cultivate a virtuous life and to be constant in good deeds. He reminds the people that they will not be able to enter the heavenly pure and holy gates by their own righteousness. He lists sins which are an abomination to the Lord (Prov. 6:16-19), and calls people to avoid them.

People kneel down again to pray after his sermon. Two brothers and a sister pray (her

words are hard to discern). They express their desire to live according to what they have just heard. The preacher concludes in prayer, thanking God for His Word and His love, and for giving purpose in life, as well as for his brothers and sisters in faith. The brother asks the Lord to let His word be proclaimed to all people, to let the Christians live to the glory of God. He also prays for people experiencing difficulties. Sighs, coughs, crying children are heard in the sanctuary. It is likely that people have grown tired.

The prayer is over and the congregation sings a well-known hymn “Let Jesus Take over My Heart”. The senior pastor comes up to the pulpit and calls the congregation to pray for a sister who has broken her leg, and for another sister who is in hospital in a grave condition, so that the Lord would give her comfort and support. In his prayer immediately after the announcements, the pastor gives thanks for the Word and its power, and asks for a blessed ability to hear the word. He prays for the requests expressed and concludes with the words of 2 Corinthians 13:14, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.”

Then the pastor announces, “Our worship is over, I ask our church members to stay for the members’ meeting. (You may leave) with God’s peace.” The noise of people moving drowns out his words, as the people begin to pack their things, leave or take their places again. As the members’ meeting has been scheduled to take place right after the worship, the service lasted for an hour and twenty minutes instead of the usual two hours. Nevertheless, all public worship elements were present. Had it been the usual two-hour service, one more brother would have preached (there would have been three sermons in total), the entire congregation would have sung two more hymns, and there would have been additional choir, solo and music group singing.

The service of the Lord’s Supper in “Golgotha” church, Minsk, December 2, 2007⁴⁸⁶

The central Baptist church in Minsk holds Communion on the first Sunday of the month, as do other Baptist churches in Belarus. The decoration of the sanctuary reminds all attendees of the nature of the event: there is a table in front of the pulpit, covered with a white table cloth embroidered with a short version of 1 Corinthians 11:25 *This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.*⁴⁸⁷ The sanctuary is lit up. There are about four hundred and fifty people there. There are many elderly sisters in the sanctuary, especially in the front rows. They have their heads covered by scarves, kerchiefs, warm hats, and

⁴⁸⁶ See Appendix 3.3.1.

⁴⁸⁷ The table is prepared on Saturday evening, and on Sunday morning, about an hour before the meeting, the sister in charge pours wine into chalices and puts the bread out.

berets. On the balcony there are young and middle-aged people. There is a choir on the balcony in front of the organ and opposite the pulpit. The choir consists of about fifty people and two-thirds of them are women.

The Lord's Supper is celebrated during the second half of the two-hour meeting. Until then the worship proceeds through the regular order: there is prayer, church singing, choir singing accompanied by the organ or piano, an eight-minute sermon about the passions of Christ (Luke 22:63-71), people kneel down to pray (two people from the audience and the preacher pray one after another), choir singing (Lord's prayer – the audience listens standing), the second sixteen-minute sermon about God's grace on 1 Timothy 1:15-17, a solo and a poem. All worship components are united by the general theme of the passion and death of Christ. Then there is a third sixteen-minute sermon on 1 Corinthians 11:25-33 (the third sermon usually lasts around twenty-five to thirty minutes, but today it is shorter because of Lord's Supper) and people kneel down to pray again. When they get to their feet, they look focussed and solemn. It seems that the theme of passion is reflected in their faces. They take their seats and the choir members begin to sing with the same solemn or even grim countenance about the struggle of Christ in Gethsemane.

During the singing the pastor leaves his place on the platform by the pulpit. He approaches the table, takes half of the table cloth for everybody to see seven wooden plates.⁴⁸⁸ There are big round loaves of bread baked by a sister on two of the plates.⁴⁸⁹ The pastor nods to the deacons to join him. Three brothers in their forties and another one about 65 years old come to the pastor and take their places – two on the right and two on the left.⁴⁹⁰ They all have dark suits and light-colored shirts and ties. Then they all wipe their hands against a big white wet towel which the pastor folds and puts aside on the table. The deacons fold their hands in front waiting for the singing to stop. Meanwhile the pastor opens his Bible, looks in it and then casts a glance to the choir.

The singing is over; people get to their feet and the pastor addresses the congregation. (There is a microphone stand on the Communion table, so everybody can hear his voice). "Dear brothers and sisters, we begin the Lord's Supper and Vasily Moiseevich [one of the deacons by the table] is going to pray." Brother Vasily gives thanks for the opportunity to remember the death of Christ, asks Christ to forgive his sins, and prays that partaking of the Communion will

⁴⁸⁸ The church used to have five glass plates and two metal ones.

⁴⁸⁹ Besides two big loaves of bread, which are about thirty centimeters in the diameter, they bake a smaller loaf for the ones taking the Communion at the evening worship. It is prepared for Sunday school teachers who are busy teaching the children in the morning, for some of the parents who stayed at home with their little ones in the morning, for church members and guests who cannot partake in the morning Communion due to various reasons. They also bake 50-60 small buns for the Communion taken to people's homes after the morning meeting. There are many elderly members in Golgotha church and some of them are sick. The deacons and preachers visit them at home with Communion.

⁴⁹⁰ Fifteen minutes before the worship starts the pastor announces the names of the brothers who are going to join him for breaking the bread. Then they leave and wash their hands.

be to God's glory. Then the pastor reads 1 Corinthians 11:23-29, reminding of how great is our Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, who became a Lamb and made us His own in Christ. He also mentions that we follow the precept in remembrance of His redemptive death. He reads 1 Corinthians 11:23b-24 again and takes a plate with the bread in his hands. The second plate is taken by the deacon on the Pastor's left. The Pastor pronounces the words of his prayer distinctly, solemnly, stressing the words and it takes him about a minute. In his prayer he thanks Christ for enduring curses, whipping, suffering and death. He asks to bless the bread, clean the hearts of the people present and take the communion to the glory of God. The deacons standing nearby keep their heads down and their eyes closed. After the prayer the choir begins to sing about the crucifixion passions and God's love. People keep standing.

The presbyter breaks each of two breads in four (the loaves are prudently incised at the bottom); he puts a piece in each of the seven deep plates and puts two smaller pieces into the last plate. Then he gives a sign to the deacons standing near him and they begin to split the bread into small pieces, breaking them off from big ones. The whole procedure takes three minutes. The choir keeps singing and church members are waiting, some with heads bowed in reverent silence. Choir singing and the preparation of the bread cease almost at the same time. A few seconds before it happens, the pastor nods his head to invite three more brothers to the table. So, there are eight people by the table before the pulpit.

In the ensuing silence some people are coughing and the pastor announces, "All God's children can take part in the Lord's Supper, those who have received holy water baptism [meaning only those who have become church members through baptism at the age of reason from 17-18 and above], and who have peace with the Lord and each other. [In some churches they add, "those who are neither admonished nor excommunicated"]. The visitors to our church may take part in the communion following the same principle. May the Lord bless the whole church as we partake in this commandment."

The Pastor passes the plates to his assistants and the congregation starts the hymn "Gospod', kogda uchenikam Ty smert' Svoyu yavil," (Lord! When You Revealed about Your Death to the Disciples),⁴⁹¹ which is, in essence, a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 11:23-28. The deacons go into the sanctuary, to the balcony and two brothers turn back to serve the preaching brothers and other ministers sitting on the platform. (There is a 79-year old retired senior pastor of the church and a former Chairman of the Baptist Union in Belarus in this group of people.) The people stay in their places and take Communion standing. The deacons pass the plates with the bread across the rows of people. The people take small pieces of bread. Some of them eat it immediately and some have some moments of silent prayer and then put the bread into their

⁴⁹¹ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 416.

mouths. Some people have put aside their hymnals to free their hands. (The majority are familiar with the hymns sung during communion.) In some of the rows people take the plate from the deacon's hands and pass it on to others who cannot reach it. During this time the Pastor takes care of the table cloth, folds it and takes away the napkins from the top of chalices filled with wine.

Having sung two stanzas of the hymn, there is a short period of silence and the choir director announces another hymn about the sufferings of Christ, which begins with the following words, "V bagryanitse stoish' Ty v ternovom ventse," (You're Standing in the Purple Robe With a Crown of Thorns).⁴⁹² The deacons have gone around the sanctuary passing bread. It has taken them about five to six minutes. They return and put the plates back on the table arranging them in two rows. The last deacon passes his plate to the pastor and the pastor offers the bread to the deacons. After that he takes the bread while the organ is playing. Two deacons raise the table cloth on both sides and cover the plates with the leftover bread.⁴⁹³

The singing and the music ceases. The Pastor opens up his Bible and reads from 1 Corinthians 11:25 and then continues, "Anatoly Semenovich [one of the deacons] is going to pray over the chalice". The pastor takes one of seven chalices filled with wine and passes it to brother Anatoly. He gives a short prayer, giving thanks for the blood of Christ, asks for a blessing on the chalice and to be worthy of partaking of it. The congregation gives a unanimous response to his prayer, "Amen". Immediately after the prayer the church continues to sing a hymn from *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, 416, starting from the third stanza, "Then You took a cup with wine". Meanwhile, the pastor is passing chalices and fabric napkins to the deacons. Following the same order, the deacons go to the congregation. People sip from the chalice and the deacon wipes the rim of the chalice with a napkin and passes it to the next person. Sometimes the congregants pass the chalice to each other and the deacons wipe the rim of the chalice after two or three people. Some of church members close their eyes after they drink from the chalice to have a moment of silent prayer, and then continue to sing.

After a minute and a half, two brothers come up to the table, taking the jars of wine and go to the hall to pour more wine into the chalices, a process that happens twice. During this time of communion the church finishes singing the hymn, and then sings another song about the suffering and the death of Christ, and then another one.⁴⁹⁴ The singing is rather slow and drawn out. The deacons return, give the chalices to the pastor, which he puts on the table to the sounds

⁴⁹² Ibid., no. 419.

⁴⁹³ After worship the bread is collected onto one plate and it is taken to church office, where the brothers finish it. The wine is poured into small bottles that are used for taking Communion to people's homes. The leftover wine is poured into a jar and kept in the refrigerator until the next month and is used again.

⁴⁹⁴ "U kreista khochu stoyat'" (I Want to Stand by the Cross) and "Grekh pobedit', o, zhelayesh' li ty?" (Do You Want to Have Victory over Sin?), *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, nos. 427, 443.

of the organ; the deacons put napkins on the table. The pastor gives the last chalice to the deacons, who take a sip. Then the pastor wipes the rim of the chalice, sips the wine and puts the chalice back on the table. In the ensuing silence someone coughs again. Two deacons raise the tablecloth from both sides and cover the plates and chalices.

The pastor congratulates the church on their participation in the Lord's Supper, and the audience responds amicably "The same to you". He reads Hebrews 9:28 and asks one of the deacons who remains on the platform to pray. The latter thanks the Lord for participation and asks Him to fill the church with faith and love. In essence the Lord's Supper is concluded with this prayer. However, it is followed by singing, the collection of donations, prayer, and choir singing. This time the people who have been standing all this time sit down. It is obvious that some are tired, given that many church members, especially the elderly, traditionally do not eat in the morning until they take part in communion. The pastor makes announcements, receives greetings from other churches, prays at the conclusion of worship and dismisses the meeting with the words, "Let us greet each other. With the peace of God." The brothers greet each other with handshakes, and the sisters, especially the elderly, greet each other with a Holy Kiss. Some people stay to talk with each other and gradually leave.

5.1. General structure and components of worship

The study of a worship service begins with an analysis of its actual structure and components. So the primary concern of this chapter, as Christopher Ellis states, is not 'What *ought* Baptist worship to be?' but 'what *is* Baptist worship and what has it been?'"⁴⁹⁵ The testimonies and observations of public worship participants become an important resource, especially in light of the claim of Martin Stringer that "understanding of the texts rather than that of practice" does not allow observing the whole picture of worship.⁴⁹⁶ This is particularly true of the traditional Baptist worship which has no set text except that of the Bible and the hymnal. The attention to current changes in worship is also helpful in defining its parameters.

A typical traditional Baptist service is composed of a combination of preaching, singing and prayer, in various forms, proportions and sequences. Its duration generally varies from an hour and a half to two hours, with a two-hour service as the most common model used in both larger and smaller churches.⁴⁹⁷ A certain scheme or "skeleton" remains unchanged from Sunday

⁴⁹⁵ Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 40.

⁴⁹⁶ Martin D. Stringer, *A Sociological History of Christian Worship* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 5.

⁴⁹⁷ Q, 2008. It is recommended that services last no longer than two hours because two hours is quite sufficient to have two or three sermons, sing several songs, and listen to special music by the choir (Motorin, "O bogosluzhenii v dni apostolov i v nashi dni," p. 9).

to Sunday and characterizes traditional public worship of Baptist churches not only in Belarus, but in former Soviet Union countries, and also emigrant Russian-speaking churches. The latter seek to preserve their identity and avoid assimilation, thereby following the traditional way of worship even more consistently than some churches in Belarus or Russia. Paradoxically, freedom of religion has led to the same closing in and conservation of the subculture that characterized the churches during the period of persecution in the Soviet Union.⁴⁹⁸

The above-mentioned form has been typical for Baptists since the emergence of these churches in the Russian Empire. According to Directive number 10677, issued by the Ministry of Justice on April 3, 1900, the criminal behaviour of Baptists included the following elements of a prayer meeting:

a) congregational singing of specially selected Bible verses and service song-books of the sect such as “The Voice of Faith,” “Spiritual Poetry,” “Christian Offerings,” etc.; b) reading of selected scriptural passages by a member of the meeting, with their sermon-like interpretation in the spirit of the “sect’s” teaching, and, finally, c) prayer on bended knees, with improvised inspirational calls, without making a sign of the cross.⁴⁹⁹

Considering that the total time of worship is usually two hours, the sequence of singing, preaching, and praying is convenient from a physiological point of view because worshippers can relax the whole body by doing “religious” physical exercises—members of the congregation sit during the sermon, stand to sing, and kneel or stand when they pray. Changing position helps to increase the body’s ability to concentrate on the “abundant instruction” provided by brothers from the pulpit. The alternation of the components also helps to maintain the intensity, although too-long sermons or prolonged prayers may sometimes quench the spirit of participants.

The general scheme reflects the basic forms (in small churches or on the weekdays) (1) and extended forms (in large churches or on holidays) (2) of a regular service.⁵⁰⁰ The leader (usually the pastor of the church) prays at the beginning, leads worship, announces the upcoming participants and hymn numbers, and makes announcements. The scheme of worship generally fits the picture of Baptists worldwide, taking into the account the importance of the Bible, prayer, preaching and singing in worship. The differences relate mostly to the form, and in particular, the shorter worship service common in Baptist churches in the West, where typically there is only one sermon and Bible reading is a separate component, which is very rarely

⁴⁹⁸ A few examples are Brookhaven Slavic Evangelical Baptist Church, PA, <http://bsebc.com>; First Russian Baptist Church in Gorham, ME, <http://frbcme.org/language/ru/>; First Russian Baptist Church in Harrisonburg/Mt. Crawford, VA, <http://frbcva.org>; ECB Church “Bethany” in Tallinn, Estonia, <http://vifania.ee>. All websites were last accessed 16 May 2019.

⁴⁹⁹ Bonch-Bruevich, *Iz mira sektantov*, p. 175.

⁵⁰⁰ The first form is typical of small churches which do not have any choir. Due to the lack of preachers in small churches there may be no sermon in the middle. Both schemes could describe the same church: Sunday evening worship or an evening worship on a weekday (column 1) and Sunday morning worship, which is the main church public service (column 2).

practiced in churches in Belarus.⁵⁰¹

1. Pastoral greeting Pastoral prayer Congregational singing First sermon Congregational prayer Congregational singing [Second sermon] [Congregational singing] Ministry of the congregation Poetry Solo or group singing Testimonies Congregational singing Third sermon Congregational prayer Congregational singing and offering Prayer of thanks for the collection Announcements Pastoral prayer	2. Pastoral greeting Pastoral prayer Congregational singing Singing of the choir First sermon Congregational prayer Congregational singing Singing of the choir Second sermon Singing of the choir Ministry of the congregation Poetry/Solo or group singing Children's participation (poems, songs) Congregational singing Third sermon Congregational prayer Call to repentance Congregational singing and offering Prayer of thanks for the collection Announcements Greetings from guests and other churches Pastoral prayer (prayer for requests handed as written notes) Blessing
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Fig.1. General schemes of worship for Baptist churches showing the differences between basic or extended forms.

The schemes outlined in Figure 1 do not take into consideration all the nuances, since each individual church adapts the structure and the number of elements in worship as required; typically little consideration is given to the structure, as attention is placed on the content.⁵⁰² Some churches, for example, concentrate on individual participation (singing, poetry and testimonies) in the middle of public worship, calling it “congregational ministry.” To give just a few illustrations of this, during “congregational ministry” time an elderly sister may sing two songs, another sister may give her testimony, the third one sing a solo and the fourth one recite a poem.⁵⁰³ Or a sister may recite a poem, then there may be presentations of two books from the

⁵⁰¹ See, e.g., examples of descriptions and different orders of service in Ellis, *Gathering*; Rodney Wallace Kennedy and Derek C. Hatch, *Gathering Together: Baptists at Work in Worship* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2013). As a researcher, I also compared the structure of worship by visiting and participating in the worship of Baptist churches in the USA, England, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and other countries. A similar picture would emerge from a web search of such terms as “order of service in Baptist churches,” “Baptist worship/structure” and viewing the first 10-12 links to the churches of the United States, Canada, or the UK.

⁵⁰² Cf. Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 74.

⁵⁰³ Church in Borovliany, Minsk region, 24 February 2013 (Personal notes, p. 40).

church library, Psalm 112 can be recited by heart and a duet follow.⁵⁰⁴ Some new elements could be added to public worship, such as a sermon for children. Probably adopting the experience of some Western churches, special sermons for children are now included in the “Beam of Hope” church in Minsk; “Salvation,” Kolodishchi, Minsk region; “Light of Truth,” Minsk.⁵⁰⁵ Nevertheless, such instances do not invalidate either the general scheme or the approach to public worship organization.

In most churches worship services currently have three sermons⁵⁰⁶ while simultaneously increasing the duration and improving the quality of preaching, which stems from the development of the system of education and the professionalization of ministry.⁵⁰⁷ Tradition is maintained in a variety of ways. An experienced minister explained to me that in the absence of other preachers he would deliver two or three sermons, but only out of practical considerations because it is difficult for people to listen to one long sermon; it is better to break it into smaller parts of fifteen to twenty minutes each.⁵⁰⁸ This was the case during the Transfiguration celebration and the worship service extended into two hours.⁵⁰⁹

In the basic type of worship service, the first sermon is the shortest, while the last is the longest.⁵¹⁰ The goal of the first sermon is to guide the congregants into the right mood for communication with God and prepare their hearts for meeting with Him. The sermon in the middle of the service, together with the last one, is meant for instruction, encouragement, and evangelism, and both can end with a call to a holy life, the life of following God's commandments, and a call to repentance. The sequence is often determined by the talent and reputation of the preachers: the last ministers of the word are the more prominent and titled preachers, the pastor himself, or guest speakers, and thus the intensity increases.

⁵⁰⁴ Church Machulishchi, Minsk region, 12 May 2014 (Personal notes, p. 40).

⁵⁰⁵ Personal visits of the author to the church services, 31 May 2009, 27 June 2010, and 26 August 2012 respectively (Personal notes, p. 9b). In December 2013 the church in Borovliany Minsk region, introduced a five-to-seven minute talk for children in the middle of public worship. This was something that I, as a pastor of the church since 2012, personally introduced. A few other churches practice something similar.

⁵⁰⁶ In the last decade of the twentieth century churches usually had four sermons.

⁵⁰⁷ M.V. Ivanov, *Dukhovnost' evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov* [Spirituality of Evangelical Christians-Baptists] (Moskva: Rossiisky soyuz evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov, 2010), pp. 20-21.

⁵⁰⁸ Pavel Obrovets, personal interview with author, Minsk, 18 November 2012 (Personal notes, p. 4b).

⁵⁰⁹ Morning worship, 19 August 2014 (Personal notes, p. 4b). In 2002, when visiting a church in Stebrovo, Brest region, southwest Belarus, I was asked to deliver three messages at the same meeting: at the beginning, in the middle, and in the end of the two-hour meeting. However, usually in a situation like this, one pastor preaches two times – at the beginning and at the end of worship.

It should be noted that it is the Sunday morning worship that principally fulfills the task of teaching for the congregation. There are Sunday school classes only for children; for adults both tradition and the lack of space do not allow cutting worship in order to give time to Bible study in groups. Bible studies for young and older adults are held in the evenings on working days—usually separately for youth and older believers.

⁵¹⁰ This is one of the unwritten rules of Baptist worship. The total time of preaching is from forty-five minutes to an hour; sometimes longer. At Communion services, participation in the Lord's Supper takes fifteen to thirty minutes and public worship could take a little bit longer than usual. The Lord's Supper could replace a sermon or the number of songs and poems could be reduced (Appendix 3.3).

Prayer and singing complement the sermons. During the congregational prayer, two to five brothers and sisters take turns to pray aloud for several minutes and preacher prays in conclusion. As one of the hymns puts it, in a “living Church” “the prayer as a mountain stream flowing into heaven.”⁵¹¹ In the house of *prayer* less time is devoted to prayer than to sermons and singing, but prayer is regarded with special reverence, piety and awe.⁵¹² In a traditional meeting, in contrast to the churches practicing contemporary worship, many people still kneel down to pray during the congregational prayer (after the first and last sermon). However, kneeling prayers gradually give way to prayers while standing. Members of churches explain this fact by the lack of space (narrow aisles), by floor covering (tiles) being uncomfortable for kneeling prayers,⁵¹³ and by non-Christians attending, who could be put in an awkward position by this tradition.⁵¹⁴ Such explanations make sense, but the changes would not have been possible without the acquaintance with the traditions and forms of other churches, especially evangelical ones in the United States, and the influence of theological education, which have contributed to an awareness of the diversity of forms in worship.

The third essential worship component is singing.⁵¹⁵ Article 26 of the Charter adopted by AUCECB in 1963 states: “The churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists have preaching and prayer as well as congregational and choir singing accompanied by music as a part of their worship service.”⁵¹⁶ Baptists sing for encouragement, edification, use songs as praise and prayer, and also as a tool of evangelism.⁵¹⁷ Singing is often called “another pulpit”⁵¹⁸ and singing in the choir is often referred to as “a sacred calling.”⁵¹⁹ In fact, worship services of the evangelical Christians in the territory of modern-day Belarus (as in general in the Russian Empire) began with Bible reading *and* singing, as typically illustrated in the following: “[In 1907 in Gomel] brothers [Prihodko] . . . rented an apartment in Fedoseevsky str., 21 (now Tsiolkovsky), where

⁵¹¹ “Izvestna mne tserkov' zhivaya” [I Know a Living Church], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 247.

⁵¹² Opening and closing pastoral prayer, congregational prayer after the first and the last sermon, which involves two to five “praying believers” each time, as well as special prayers of thanks and prayer requests take an average of fifteen minutes, which is about one fifth or sixth of the service.

⁵¹³ Cf. the instruction on doing church worship in the model of the Central Moscow ECB Church. “If the room is full then congregational prayer is done while everybody is standing. If there is an opportunity, then the people kneel down to pray.” (Motorin, “O bogoslužhenii v dni apostolov i v nashi dni,” p. 9.)

⁵¹⁴ The pastor in Ushachi, Vitebsk region, reported that they had replaced kneeling prayers by standing prayers for the sake of non-Christian visitors, who were not used to kneeling down to pray. (Petr Lukashevich, personal interview with author, Ushachi, 1 June 2014 (Personal notes, p. 18). According to Lukashevich, now the church wants to return to the earlier practice, since few non-Christians attend worship anyway (Ibid).

⁵¹⁵ The number of congregational songs varies from three to five. Taking into consideration the additional singing of three/four songs by the choir, music groups and individual church members, singing can take more than thirty minutes.

⁵¹⁶ Belousov, “Gospod' sila moya i pesn',” p. 74.

⁵¹⁷ See more about the purpose of the Christian hymnody in Meego Rimmel, “‘Wake up, my Heart, and Glorify the Creator in Singing!’ Sense of Virtue in the Primary Theology of Anabaptist and Estonian Baptist Hymnody” (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2011), pp. 58-59.

⁵¹⁸ Karev, “Sviashchennodeistviya tserkvi,” p. 39.

⁵¹⁹ Vardo Kholm, “Poite Gospodu” [Sing to the Lord], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no.1 (1957): 30.

the people got together in a family circle in the evening, read the Gospel and sang psalms...”⁵²⁰

Today the traditional worship service features a rich musical tradition, representing a variety of styles and forms: congregational singing, choir singing,⁵²¹ the singing of men’s and women’s groups, solos, duets, pop-groups, brass bands, orchestras of folk instruments, symphony and string orchestras,⁵²² and so on. There are a variety of song lyrics and themes that reflect the diversity of religious feelings, as well as the history of the growth of the churches across the Russian Empire and the relationships with believers of other countries. In some churches, the choir may occasionally sing the Creed.⁵²³ The main instrument is typically the piano, and sometimes the organ,⁵²⁴ electric organ,⁵²⁵ guitar, tape recorder,⁵²⁶ button accordion,⁵²⁷ synthesizers, small music groups, and recently even recorded music streamed from a computer⁵²⁸ to accompany the singing. Besides these, in the traditional Baptist service there can be various types of wind instruments, violin and cello, electric guitars, cymbals, or bells. Whenever possible, the number and the variety of instruments is encouraged. The evolution of the use of instruments can be traced in the example of the Baptist church in Orsha. Initially the church did not have any musical accompaniment. In the middle of the twentieth century they got a harmonium, and during the opening of the new house of prayer in 1995 there was a piano. Now the church uses electronic and string instruments, as well as musical audio records.⁵²⁹

Poetry starts our list of “minor” components. The tradition of using poetry goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century. A 1928 issue of *Khristianskiy Soyuz* magazine includes a report of a meeting in which the “boys recited Christian poems and sang to the glory of God.”⁵³⁰ Another magazine describing the situation in Western Belarus gives a similar example: “There were children involved in the second day of the celebration. They sang and recited poems to the glory of the Lord and for the encouragement of the people present.” “Our young people presented a program of songs, poetry, good wishes and instructions.”⁵³¹ In fact, reciting poetry

⁵²⁰ Kolesnichenko, “Gomel’skoi tserkvi 100 let,” p. 8.

⁵²¹ There could be several choirs in a large church, such as “the first,” “youth,” “teenage” and “children’s” choir. Toivo Pilli believes that particular attention to choir singing could be explained by the fact that in the Soviet era it was virtually the only legitimate form of church group activity. (Pilli, “Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Estonia: The Shaping of Identity, 1945-1991,” pp. 86-88.)

⁵²² This reflects the fact that the Baptists now have opportunities for getting graduate degrees in music and it facilitates professionalism in music ministry, especially in large churches.

⁵²³ Church on Fortechnaya 61/1, Brest; “Golgotha,” Minsk (Personal notes, p. 15b).

⁵²⁴ “Golgotha,” Minsk (Personal notes, p. 16b).

⁵²⁵ “Light of Gospel,” Minsk (Personal notes, p. 16b).

⁵²⁶ “Revival,” Mogilev, 2005; Church in Borovliany, Minsk region, 2012 (Personal notes, p. 16b).

⁵²⁷ Churches in Gorodets, Brest region; Bol’shaya Ganuta, Minsk region (Personal notes, p. 16b).

⁵²⁸ Music is in harmony with the lyrics projected in the screen. Naroch and Rudensk, Minsk region, 2012 (Personal notes, p. 16b).

⁵²⁹ Orsha, 7 June 2009 (Personal notes, p. 16b). In 2018 the church in Orsha celebrated its centenary.

⁵³⁰ M. Savik, “Radost’ vsyakoy dushe” [The Joy of Every Soul], *Khristianskiy Soyuz*, no. 9-10 (September-October 1928): 164.

⁵³¹ *Slowo Pojednania* [Word of Reconciliation], no. 1(4) (January-February, 1939): 62.

became one of the ways to involve young people in ministry.

The beginning of the twenty-first century was marked by fewer people (especially the young) getting involved in reciting poetry in traditional churches, perhaps because of the passivity of the participants or the loss of interest in poetry in general. This tendency prompted the authors of *Vestnik Istiny* to write an article entitled “Recitation Is Also an Important Ministry.” The authors emphasize that recitation (of different kinds of poems) is a special and a challenging type of ministry. The general idea of the article is that one has to take a serious approach to selecting the text, praying, learning the text (preferably by heart), loving the audience, being expressive, and using appropriate intonation. The authors write, “With the assistance of the Holy Spirit poems can affect the hearts of the audience in the same way as through a good sermon.”⁵³²

Testimonies of church members may also feature in the service, even though it is not done regularly. In the “House of the Gospel” church in Vitebsk the pastor typically asks someone in the congregation to tell others “how the Lord has led him or her during this week.” A similar practice exists in the church in Luninets, Brest region, but here church members themselves volunteer to share.⁵³³ A testimony may focus on the person’s walk with the Lord, God’s protection, care, and miracles in their life, including healing. Women tend to be more active in this.⁵³⁴ New converts share about discovering their way to the Lord. Such testimonies about conversion and God’s providence in personal life were more common in the 1990s, when there was an influx of new people. As the membership of the congregations has stabilized, new converts’ testimonies are less frequent.

In addition to the components listed above there may be (as part of the ministry of the congregation) quoting from the Bible from memory, reading articles from *Our Daily Bread* or a Christian newspaper or book,⁵³⁵ and the participation of children (singing and reciting poetry) which can take up to a third of the worship time in small or medium-sized churches. For example, during Christmas worship in Berezino, Minsk region, more than an hour between the

⁵³² “Deklamatsiya – trud tozhe otvetstvennyy” [Recitation Is Also an Important Ministry], *Vestnik Istiny*, no. 3 (2003): 50.

⁵³³ Q, 2013, Questionnaire of Seminary students (November, 2013).

⁵³⁴ In the “Light of Gospel” church in Minsk in the evening worship service, a sister in Christ gave a ten-minute testimony about the blessings she encountered as a result of her lung cancer diagnosis and subsequent surgery. Before and after the surgery she felt the constant support of her husband, daughter and other relatives. She expressed her happiness for having faith in the Lord, for belonging to a church and having Christian relatives, implying that Christians had more chance to endure sickness. She remarked that non-Christians who had been in the hospital with her were not doing so well. (Personal visit of the author to the church service, 14 April 2013 [Personal notes, p. 42].) Another testimony in the church in Borovliany, Minsk region went as follows: “The Lord taught me to be humble...I lost my monthly ticket and I wondered why the Lord let it happen. In a while I lost another monthly ticket...I thought again, ‘What does the Lord want to tell me?’ I remembered Job who lost everything and said, ‘blessed be the name of the LORD.’ I also blessed the Lord and later on I found one of the monthly tickets.” (Personal visit of the author to the church service, 24 February 2013 [Personal notes, p. 42].)

⁵³⁵ Starye Terushky and Zhdanovich, Minsk region. Personal visits of the author to the church services on 29 May 2011 and 31 August 2011, respectively (Personal notes, p. 53b).

two sermons was filled with children and youth participating, with poems and singing, a solo, singing by small groups, and receiving greetings from other churches.⁵³⁶

In the majority of churches, the collection of offerings is usually done at the closing of the service every Sunday morning, and in some of them only twice or even just once a month. Before the collection the pastor makes an announcement along the lines of, “Brothers and sisters, at the time of congregational singing the [serving] brothers will collect your donations for the needs of the church and God’s work.”⁵³⁷ The term “plate collection,” which was used in the twentieth century, along with the practice of collection by using plates or baskets now generally belongs to the past. Today, in most churches, the servers use specially made bags, which suggests discretion and respect for the mystery of the giving.⁵³⁸ However, some small churches practice another method: while congregation sings the people come out front and place the banknotes on the table by the pulpit.⁵³⁹ Usually offering is not explicitly related to the rest of the worship. “Material ministry,” as the collection of offerings is typically termed, is seen to relate to one’s spiritual well-being in general and “to a certain extent it could be used as an indicator of the spiritual life of the whole church, and of the passion of its members for God’s ministry.”⁵⁴⁰

The end of the worship service may include greetings from guests and other churches, as modeled by greetings recorded in Paul’s epistles,⁵⁴¹ announcements,⁵⁴² a call to repentance

⁵³⁶ Personal visit of the author to the church service, 7 January 2009 (Personal notes, p. 53b). This church has sixty-seven members (2011), as well as many children and teenagers.

⁵³⁷ The hymn “Vsio Iisusu otdayu ya” [All to Jesus I surrender] is commonly sung during the collection, emphasizing the idea of dedication, sacrifice and commitment. The first stanza and chorus are as follows:

All to Jesus I surrender, I belong to my Saviour,
In the hope and humble spirit, in His light I long to walk.

I give it all to You, that is what I pursue,
All to You, my precious Saviour, I give it all to You. (*Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 397.)

⁵³⁸ This reflects the Soviet society’s value of the collective over against the private. Private information was typically made publicly available, such as one’s salary or grades at school and University. The collapse of collectivist ideology was followed by an increased respect for privacy. In the context of traditional Baptist worship, it was also reflected in leaving “the plates” behind, so that donations are no longer open for the public to see when they are being passed around. Nevertheless, some churches, for example the church in Redigirovo, Brest region, continue to use open baskets.

⁵³⁹ Church in Liuban’, Minsk region, 2010. Some churches do not have any collection in public worship. Their church members can put their gifts in a box for donations by the entrance of the house of prayer. E.g. Rudensk, Minsk region, 2013; Mal’kovichi, Brest region, 2008. There are also cases when church members bring their donations once a month to a minister or cashier, who keep a careful record of gifts from each church member, encouraging them to be sacrificial and give a tithe. E.g. Churches in Volok, Liubacha, Minsk region, 2013. (Personal notes, p. 39). Belarusian Baptists generally do not hold to the doctrine of tithing, but some pastors insist on this practice in their churches.

⁵⁴⁰ Gnida, “Poryadok provedeniya bogoslužhenii v tserkvakh evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov,” pp. 72-73.

⁵⁴¹ Such greetings may be received as someone passes a note or immediately addresses the congregation. Motorin recommended that visitors who wished to bring greetings from their congregations should write them on pieces of paper, which would be passed to the pulpit; at the end of worship the leading brother would read those greetings to the congregation which welcomes them “with a grateful heart.” (Motorin, “O bogoslužhenii v dni apostolov i v nashi dni,” p. 9.) In most cases, the pastor also asks people present if anyone brings greetings to our church, to which individuals may rise and say something such as “Church ‘Golgotha’ in Minsk sends its greetings,” “Please accept greetings from church in Kobrin,” “Sister Anna Pavlovna is in hospital; she sends her cordial greetings to the whole church and asks us to pray for her,” or “Brother Klopot Ivan Karpovich called from America and sent his greetings to the church.” At the end of these greetings, the pastor leads a traditional response on behalf

(depending on the church and the presence of non-believers this could take place at almost every meeting, or very rarely), the final prayer (sometimes with the recitation of “grace”),⁵⁴³ dismissal (“With God's peace”) and an exhortation “Let us greet each other,” which is perceived as a call for exchanging handshakes. Some female members (and, much less frequently, the males) still keep the tradition of the Holy Kiss,⁵⁴⁴ but on the whole it is getting rarer in traditional worship due to societal changes, an influx of members who do not come from an evangelical background, and foreign guests visiting and introducing other greeting habits, such as handshakes and hugs. Nevertheless, the pursuit for the “New Testament church” and fulfilling the Scriptures in a literal way⁵⁴⁵ contributes to keeping the tradition in some ECB churches, especially in southern Belarus and in some rural churches.⁵⁴⁶

The Lord's Supper is the last element to be mentioned here, since it is practiced only once a month and is not a part of traditional weekly worship.⁵⁴⁷ It is celebrated on the first Sunday of

of the whole church:

“For the greetings you have sent we say...”

“Thank you,” – the congregation continues,

“And we ask you to send our greetings to the churches you are going to visit.”

“We ask!” – the congregation confirms. (Personal notes, p. 46b.)

⁵⁴² Announcements can be divided into two broad categories – church announcements (related to the schedule of church services, various kinds of church ministries for the next week like Bible study, choir practice, guests visiting, special meeting for the youth and Sunday school teachers, weddings of the church members, a reminder about fasting on Friday, preparing oneself for the Lord's Supper, information on church discipline, funerals, events in the brotherhood, conferences, and subscriptions to Christian newspapers and magazines) and social announcements (related to the everyday life of church members and their relationships, which may include announcements about someone in the church looking for a job or offering a job, apartment-to-let offers or rental-apartment announcements, etc.). (Q, 2008.)

An additional interesting tradition in some churches is related to the announcements about brothers and sisters who “have passed away into eternity.” At the public worship that comes after a funeral, the pastor usually refers to the late brother or sister, and the congregation sings a stanza and a refrain from the song “We Are at the Shore.”

Many saints have already got to that shore,

The time is coming for us to go there with joy,

Let us have faith and wait for our Lord crossing the Jordan,

His mighty hand will bring us to the land of Canaan. (*Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 491.)

A report from 1974 describes a similar recognition of deceased members in a church in Bratsk, Gomel region, which was celebrating the 50th anniversary of its foundation. After prayer at the beginning of worship, “Pastor F.I. Malets read a list of church members who had passed away into eternity. The congregation honored the memory of these deceased church veterans by standing. It was then followed by preaching.” (*Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 2 (1974), p. 75.)

⁵⁴³ The final pastoral prayer could have such words at the end: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (2 Cor. 13:13).

⁵⁴⁴ Further on this practice amongst Eastern Slavic churches see Keith G. Jones, “Kiss of Peace,” in *A Dictionary of the European Baptist Life and Thought* ed. John H.Y. Briggs (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2009), p. 290.

⁵⁴⁵ 1 Pet. 5:14; Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12.

⁵⁴⁶ Q, 2008. At the same time the developments in theological education and the availability of the books on hermeneutics result in a rejection of literal interpretation. Such practices as greeting each other with the Holy Kiss as well as the controversial issue of head coverings for women (1 Cor. 11:1-16) is explained by some as a cultural context.

⁵⁴⁷ Jean-Jacques von Allmen calls it “a solemn exception,” *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, p. 289. Some identify the Lord's Supper as the “Great Omission,” as “protestant worship shifted from the centrality of sacrifice to the centrality of scripture.” See Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), p. 480.

each month during the morning service.⁵⁴⁸ It is usually served at the end of the worship service, while the preceding part of the service prepares the congregation for taking part in the sufferings and death of the Lord, as each member should to “be worthy to take part in Lord’s Supper.”⁵⁴⁹ One is expected to prepare for the Lord’s Supper in advance, “so that each church member could test himself or herself in the light of the Word of God, as well as personal relationships with the Lord, brothers and sisters and the neighbors”.⁵⁵⁰ A prominent minister of ICCECB recommends abiding in “fasting and prayer, staying away from intimate relationships in marriage, and the whole body should be pure and properly clothed (1 Cor. 7:6; Heb. 10:22)” in preparing to take part in the Supper.⁵⁵¹ The very act of participating “asks for special attitude, such as special focus, special state of prayer, silence and awe.”⁵⁵² Even though the bread and the cup are often called “symbols” they are understood to be endowed with special qualities, since it is a symbol of the body and the blood of *Christ*. Hence there are no hesitations about drinking from the same cup from a hygienic point of view, as the Lord is seen to be acting in a special way through this rite. (People have the same degree of confidence in the statement that one cannot catch a cold while being baptized in an ice hole in winter.) Traditional churches would have a negative attitude towards replacing the common cup with a set of individual cups. Such careful preparation towards taking part and reverence in attitude stresses the special significance and value of the person of Christ, His passion and death.

5.2. Content of a traditional Baptist worship service

The topic or the theme(s) of a traditional meeting is usually not planned beforehand. The only predictable element is the general structure of the meeting, while the content of its specific parts depends on the inspiration of its participants. A meeting may present, in an observation from a different context which nevertheless aptly describes the issue in Belarusian churches, “an

⁵⁴⁸ As most Baptists present it, the Lord’s Supper is not celebrated too often in order to avoid familiarity, and it is not celebrated too rarely so that we would not forget about the death and passion of Christ. On the differences in the frequency of celebrating the Lord’s Supper throughout church history, see Moody, *The Word of Truth*, p. 473. Christopher J. Ellis believes, the Eucharist becomes “central to a worshipping community without it needing to be weekly” (*Gathering*, p. 252).

⁵⁴⁹ *Verouchenie evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov v Belarusi, prinyatoe na 43-m s’ezde evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov (1985 g.)*. Unpublished material. Section VII, The Church of Christ.

⁵⁵⁰ Gnida, “Poryadok provedeniya bogoslužhenii v tserkvakh evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov,” p. 73.

⁵⁵¹ N. Khrapov, *Dom Bozhii i sluzhenie v nem. Prakticheskoe posobie dlya sluzhiteley tserkvi. Pererabotannoe izdanie* [The House of God and the Ministry There. Practical guide for ministers. Revised Edition] (Souz tserkvei evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov, 2003), ch. 10, <http://www.blagovestnik.org/books/00280.htm#40>, last accessed 16 May 2019.

⁵⁵² N.I. Vysotskiy, “Znachenie i sila dukhovnoy muzyki” [The Importance and Power of Spiritual Music], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 5 (1978), p. 61.

unassembled potpourri with no frame or motif unifying them.”⁵⁵³ Preachers usually speak on different topics, based on what “God puts in their hearts.” An example from one church illustrates this situation. At the morning service, the first preacher talked about walking in the light, the second taught about obedience to God and the third dwelled on God’s greatness and glory. At the evening service, the first preacher spoke about the importance of attending meetings, the second spoke about a Christian’s heart and peace in the heart, while the third contrasted the role and the work of Satan with that of God.⁵⁵⁴ Such sermon topics, deductive in structure, are designed largely for believers and the sermons aim at strengthening the relationships of Christians with the Lord. Speakers assume that those present have much familiarity with the Bible, its historical and cultural background, Christian terminology, and sometimes church history.

The subject of prayers are determined by direct inspiration of those who are praying. Baptists take a stand against any formal prayer written beforehand for the fear that prayer may become a ritual. Even the opponents of evangelicals stressed this point, commenting that many “instructions for members of sectarian churches state that prayer should not be automatic and that a person should put all their feelings into it and feel connected to the deity at the time of prayer.”⁵⁵⁵ Yet prayers do share some common motifs. At the very beginning of the meeting the pastor, and then after the first sermon, members (as everyone has opportunity to pray) give thanks for the wonderful opportunity to come to the house of prayer and worship the Lord, to see each other's faces, listen to preaching, sing, and they ask for a blessing over the worship, preachers, choir members and other participants in the meeting, and ask the Lord to prepare them for listening and praise. At the end, after the last sermon, they give thanks for the instruction they have received, for the wonderful (regardless of their quality) sermons and singing, and ask for the strength needed to “dissolve by faith”⁵⁵⁶ what they have heard.⁵⁵⁷ Quite often the prayer is completed with the words “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, amen” or a phrase “in the name of Jesus we ask, amen,” as the literal interpretation of Christ's teaching about the efficacy of prayer.⁵⁵⁸

Baptists in Belarus do not separate the prayer at the meeting into different types, such as invocation, adoration, thanksgiving, supplication, intercession, confession; they consider prayer

⁵⁵³ Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship*, p. 279.

⁵⁵⁴ “Light of Gospel,” Minsk, 14 December 2008. In “Golgotha,” Minsk, 20 November 2011 the first preacher read James 3:17 and Prov. 8:11 and spoke about wisdom coming from above; the second talked about God’s grace in Eph. 2:4-9; the third meditated about the future and the comfort which Christians have in the Lord, referring to Rev. 1:8; 21:1-7. (Personal notes, p. 9.)

⁵⁵⁵ Belov, *Sekty, sektantstvo, sektanty*, p. 89.

⁵⁵⁶ Heb. 4:2, literal translation from the Russian Synodal Bible (RSB).

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptizm i Baptisty*, p. 208.

⁵⁵⁸ John 14:13.

as communion with God in general. Regular prayer includes thanksgiving (for spiritual blessings, opportunity to be at the meeting, preachers, singers, youth), petition (asking for forgiveness of “voluntary and involuntary” sins, for the strengthening of the faith), and intercession (primarily prayers for repentance of unbelieving children, grandchildren, husbands,⁵⁵⁹ relatives, and neighbors, especially those who are enslaved by alcoholism).⁵⁶⁰ Usually the content of prayer is limited to personal requests of the members and to church ministry. Only in rare cases it is possible to witness specific prayers about Christians in other countries or prayers about racial, social or economic justice. However, many churches did begin to pray for Ukraine regularly in connection with the outbreak of hostilities in April 2014 as Ukraine borders with Belarus. It is assumed that temporal, earthly, issues are not worth paying much attention to. The main task is to save a human soul. Political isolation in the past and negative attitude to mass media and the news in general also play a certain role.

Nevertheless, some congregants ask to pray about their individual “earthly” needs, presenting them to the congregation in their notes. They most often ask the church to pray about their health and the health of their family (while pastors often try to emphasize the primary importance of spiritual health) and about their unbelieving relatives, or express some urgent daily-life requests.⁵⁶¹ These requests often concern issues like moving to a new place, entering a university or looking for a job, or sometimes to thank God for various blessings such as the birth of a child or healing, and answered prayers. There is an assumption that pastoral prayer is particularly powerful and effective. Pastoral prayer is considered to be the prayer of the whole church to which the congregation expresses its assent by a loud “amen”. The prayer requests that may be sent over to the pastor are typically characterized by the following: 1) “Dear brothers and sisters, I would kindly ask you to pray to our Lord Jesus Christ about my brother Vasily Stepanovich who is now going through a medical examination in Minsk City Hospital no. 3. His stomach will not take any food. For over two weeks his life has been supported through an intravenous line. Brother Dmitry.” 2) “My dear church, I thank you for your prayers. My son Victor has had no fever for two days over a month since he felt sick. Praise the Lord. I would also ask to pray that the Lord may touch his heart and call him onto the way of salvation. Sister Praskovia.” 3) “I ask the church to pray that the Lord may bless me in my trip and keep me safe on the way. I am going to Sevastopol. Thank you all. Sister Tatyana.” 4) “The Melyanets Family, Alexander and Tatyana, thank the Lord for the safe birth of a daughter. We ask that the Lord

⁵⁵⁹ Prayer topics reflect gender dynamics in churches. It is unusual for the husband to be a member and not his wife, but there would be a number of female members whose spouses do not belong to the congregation. For example, a church in Borovliany, Minsk region, has seven female church members who have non-Christians husbands, while only one male member in the congregation has a non-Christian wife.

⁵⁶⁰ Q, 2008.

⁵⁶¹ See Motorin, “O bogoslužhenii v dni apostolov i v nashi dni,” p. 9.

may bless this baby as it grows up and restore the mother's health. Thank you. Alexander Melyanets."⁵⁶²

Songs, and pieces of poetry specially selected for the subject of the sermon, make the diversity of topics less noticeable and smooth out the structure of the service. Besides, the very diversity and disconnectedness of themes is not regarded as a failure of the service. The Holy Spirit is understood to address each person according to their spiritual needs. If it becomes evident that two of the preachers have selected the same Scripture text on which to speak, the second one may decide that his sermon approaches the text from a different perspective, or he may have an extra message based on a different passage, just in case.⁵⁶³ In practice, a variety of topics, but within certain limits, is seen to be better than repetition of the same thoughts. Listeners do not complain about the diversity but about the quality of the material or the extent of one component of the meeting at the expense of another.

In addition, traditional worship is held together by an evident common motif, or the "main focaliser," namely the motif of "the cross, or more precisely, the broken and glorified body of Jesus Christ who descended to the earth and ascended into heaven."⁵⁶⁴ The centrality of the motif of the cross can be recognized both in the official statements made by church leaders⁵⁶⁵ and the content of songs, prayers, and sermons themselves. Among the most popular hymns are songs about Christ:⁵⁶⁶ "Vest' ob Iisuse skazhi mne" (Tell Me the News About Jesus), "Ne proidi, Iisus, menia Ty" (Pass me not, the Gentle Savior), "Iisus, dushi Spasitel'" (Jesus, Savior of My Soul), "Ty dlya menia Spasitel'" (For Me You Are the Savior), "Ot greha ya spasion" (I Am Saved from Sin), "Iisusa imia sladko mne" (Jesus' Name Is Sweet to Me).⁵⁶⁷ During the Lord's Supper, songs which focus on Christ are sung, describing His sufferings, filled with feelings of pain and Jesus' death. Every first Sunday of the month Baptists sing "Gospod', kogda uchenikam Ty smert' Svoyu yavil," (Lord! When You Revealed Your Death to the Disciples), "Kto podnimet svoi vzor na Khrista na kreste," (Who Will Raise His Eyes to Christ on the Cross), "V bagryanitse stoish' Ty v ternovom ventse," (You're Standing in the Purple Robe With a Crown of Thorns), "Vzoydem na Golgofu, moy brat" (Let Us Go Up to Calvary, My Brother), "Znayesh' li

⁵⁶² "Light of Gospel" church in Minsk, 16 and 23 March, 2008 (Personal notes, p. 18b).

⁵⁶³ Personal interview with the pastor of the Baptist church in Man'kovichi, Brest region, 18 May 2008. I had this experience when preaching in the evening in "Light of Gospel," Minsk (15 September 2013). For the conclusion (the third sermon) I decided to preach about the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). However, the second guest preacher came to the pulpit and read the same text as the basis of his sermon. My dilemma was resolved in a rather surprising way. First of all, the guest preacher "embarked" on the Old Testament in the third minute of his sermon and never came back to the parable. Secondly, his sermon took such a long time that there was no time left for the third sermon. So, when I came into the pulpit, I could only read the parable in another translation and invite people to pray. I preached the sermon I had prepared the following Sunday.

⁵⁶⁴ Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, p. 6.

⁵⁶⁵ Ivanov, *Dukhovnost' evangel'skikh khristian baptistov*, p. 15.

⁵⁶⁶ Q, 2008.

⁵⁶⁷ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, nos. 9, 30, 50, 138, 230, 745.

ruchey, chto bezhit,” (Do You Know the Stream That Flows from the Cross)⁵⁶⁸ and similarly themed hymns.

The interior of church buildings also typically indicates the centrality of the motif of Christ and his cross. One of the most popular texts which can be seen on the front wall of the house of prayer says: “We preach Christ who was crucified, was resurrected, and is coming again.”⁵⁶⁹ A Christocentric approach is applied to interpreting the Old Testament, generally in the form of seeing it as allegorical for/to the life of Jesus. Alexander Negrov states that in a similar way to the Orthodox tradition,

evangelical readers of the Bible tend to interpret the rituals of the Old Testament as typological references to the life and deeds of Jesus Christ. Of course, in this regard we may say that the Christocentric reading of the Bible by evangelicals parallels not only Orthodox tendencies, but also reflects the indirect theological influence of the Protestant Reformation in Europe.⁵⁷⁰

5.3. Temporal dimension of public worship

The aspect of time in church worship or the correlation of worship services to different time cycles is not given much coverage in articles, notes and practical guidelines on the structure of church worship, although there is a subsection called the “liturgical calendar of Evangelical Christians-Baptists”⁵⁷¹ in a manual published in 2010. Attention is given to the content of a particular worship service and its influence on those attending the house of prayer, but not to the relation of the service to the preceding or the following services. Nevertheless, there is some allowance for distinguishing between the weekly, monthly, and yearly cycles of worship in Baptist churches.⁵⁷² “Resident aliens”⁵⁷³ live according to a different calendar from Sunday to Sunday, from the first Sunday of the month when they have the communion to the first Sunday of the next month, and from Christmas to Easter, making brief stops at other feasts, then proceeding through Pentecost and Harvest back to Christmas.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., nos. 416, 417, 419, 420, 421.

⁵⁶⁹ See footnote 647.

⁵⁷⁰ Negrov, “Hermeneutics in Transition: Three Hermeneutical Horizons of Slavic Evangelicals in the Post-Soviet Period,” pp. 41-42.

⁵⁷¹ Ivanov, *Dukhovnost' evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov*, p. 13.

⁵⁷² For the history of the origins of the Christian Calendar and the meaning of the Seasons see the following: J.C.J. Metford, *The Christian year. An indispensable companion to the holy days, festivals and seasons of the ecclesiastical year* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991); Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship. Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), pp. 217-260. The book by Robert E. Webber is very useful for preachers: *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004).

⁵⁷³ From the title of the book by Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

The foundation of the weekly cycle is Sunday. In Slavic languages other than Russian, the word for Sunday (Belarusian “nyadzelya,” Bulgarian and Ukrainian “nedilya,” Czech “nedele,” etc.) denotes abstaining from “doing,” and means “not working”. It is often used in casual speech in many rural communities in Belarus. However, the main theological meaning of Sunday is not related to leisure but rather to worship,⁵⁷⁴ and this is reflected in the use of the language itself. The word for Sunday in Russian (the language of worship in Baptist churches)⁵⁷⁵ is “voskresenie,” which literally means “resurrection.” It is the Lord’s Day and each Sunday is a little Easter. In the Orthodox tradition it is also a day of worship and joy, “the queen of days.”⁵⁷⁶ The authors of the Orthodox dictionary note that “having and attending Sunday services was considered so important in ancient times that it was not canceled even during the period of persecution.”⁵⁷⁷ Usually one (morning) or two (morning and evening) worship services are held on Sunday, and they begin at 10.00 a.m. and 6.00 p.m., although some congregations may slightly vary these times. Numbers 28:9-10 is used as a biblical foundation for the tradition of holding two meetings on Sunday (a double offering on the day of Sabbath), and most Baptists interpret this as a good tradition.⁵⁷⁸ In practice, around fifteen out of sixty-four churches of the Association of Baptist Churches in Minsk and Minsk area had evening worship services on Sundays in 2013. The others limited themselves to only one service. There are various reasons for this: some church members cannot attend evening worship because of the great distance they must travel, public transport schedule limitations, or poor health; some congregations do not have their own buildings, but rent a room for a limited number of hours on Sundays; in some distant rural areas there are no ministers able to take an evening worship service.⁵⁷⁹

The weekly cycle also consists of one or two services on weekdays in addition to Sunday

⁵⁷⁴ Due to the specifics of their work some Christians can neither have rest on Sunday nor come for church worship, and others may not experience much rest since they are busy with involvement in two services and other Sunday events. The concept of the Lord’s Day as the day of liberation and rest as expressed in Exod. 20:8-11 and Deut. 5:12-15 remains a challenge. (Mark Searle, “The Church Gives Thanks and Remembers,” in *The Church Gives Thanks and Remembers*, ed. by Lawrence J. Johnson (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1984): 15-16.)

⁵⁷⁵ See footnote 1014.

⁵⁷⁶ *Polnyy pravoslavnyy bogoslovskiy entsiklopedicheskiy slovar', t. 1* [Unabridged Orthodox Theological Encyclopedic Dictionary, v. 1] (Moscow: Vozrozhdenie, 1992), p. 564.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 564-565.

⁵⁷⁸ Q, 2008.

⁵⁷⁹ Some churches are exploring alternative forms of fellowship. By 2010, for example, because of low attendance, churches in Machulishchi, Slutsk, Stolbtsy, Minsk region had replaced the Sunday evening service with Bible study in groups. (Q, 2013.) The new practice was not accepted in Slutsk because of some internal conflicts, and at the beginning of 2013 the church went back to holding Sunday evening services. (Gennadiy Ralko, personal interview with author, Minsk, 11 February 2014 [Personal notes, p. 20].) Ralko is a Deputy senior presbyter in the Minsk area and pastor of ECB church in Slutsk. Another church in the Minsk region, “Bible church” in Borisov, reinstated evening services in the summer of 2012 having stopped them in the mid-1990s, believing this would encourage church discipline and Christian maturity. (Interview with pastor Sergei Zhukovskiy, Minsk, 11 February 2014 [Personal notes, p. 20].) My personal experience of visiting churches shows that evening services are still well-supported in Brest, Kobryn, and other places in the Brest region. There are many Christians of the third and fourth generation there, and attending all church services is considered natural.

services.⁵⁸⁰ A service held during work days has the status of a prayer service with the distinguishing feature of prayers by church members (mostly on their knees) not only at the beginning and end of the service but also after each sermon. These services are usually not intended for unbelievers, although they are welcome, but are designed for the needs of the church and its members. On average, the attendance at these meetings is lower, sometimes significantly so, compared with the attendance at services on a Sunday morning.⁵⁸¹ Some church members regard these services as meetings for the most committed and spiritual church members.⁵⁸²

The monthly cycle of services is centered on the Lord's Supper. The meeting with the breaking of bread serves in the first place as the beginning of the cycle in the current month, but also marks the end of the cycle because preparation for the Lord's Supper, including the traditional fast on Friday, begins during the previous week.⁵⁸³ The monthly cycle is particularly significant for those church members who are not able to attend church worship as a result of their poor health or advanced age. On the first Sunday of the month the brothers (primarily pastors and deacons) visit such people at home and in hospitals holding small worship services with communion there. In this way the people can be involved in church life at least once a month.⁵⁸⁴ The monthly cycle is also important with regard to preaching in the church. Many churches arrange their preaching schedule for a month and this determines the preparation for and involvement of preachers in the worship services.⁵⁸⁵

The yearly circle encompasses the key festivals related to the events of Christ's life and the life of the church. Observance of such special days is conditioned by both the Orthodox

⁵⁸⁰ On weekdays, services may start a little later so that church members and guests may come to worship after work; these services may start as early as 6:30 p.m. or as late as 8 p.m. In Kobrin, Brest region, services take place on Wednesday and Friday evenings. Services at "Emmanuel" Church in Mogilev on Thursdays and Saturdays start at 10:00 a.m. because their building is located on the outskirts of the city and because most of those who regularly attend services on weekdays and Saturday are the elderly, and it is difficult for them to return home late in the day. (Personal visit of the author to the church service, 26 February 2019 [Personal notes, p. 20].)

⁵⁸¹ "Golgotha," the oldest Baptist church in Minsk, besides Sunday has worship services on Thursday and Saturday evenings (prayer meetings). In 2013 less than ten percent of members attended the service on Saturday, as for most people this is a very inconvenient time. In the church council and members' meetings they often raise the issue of canceling the service but there is no consensus so far. (Pavel Osenenko, Minsk, personal interview with author, 7 March 2017 [Personal notes, p. 20].)

⁵⁸² Q, 2008.

⁵⁸³ The preachers frequently stress the importance of preparation for the Lord's Supper. CCECB minister Khrapov made the recommendation, "It would be better to abide in fasting and prayer, abstaining from the intimacy in marriage and the body should be pure and properly clothed" (1 Cor. 7:6; Heb. 10:22). (*Dom Bozhii i sluzhenie v nem*, ch. 10.)

⁵⁸⁴ An authoritative AUCECB minister has proposed that there is no need to have Communion in houses every month. "The practice of life shows that the Lord's Supper is served at home for the sick and handicapped, who are not able to attend worship for a long time...only on the request of the sick person who has been ill for a long time. There is no reason to practice it every month and on the same day." (Kolesnikov, *Khristianin! Znaesh li y kak dolzhno postupat' v dome Bozhiem?* p. 53.)

⁵⁸⁵ Q, 2008. A preaching/sermon schedule usually comprises of a list of the preachers' names, dates of the sermons and their order (the first, second or the third).

environment and references to the Old Testament,⁵⁸⁶ such as the use of the text “Observe the Feast of the Harvest”⁵⁸⁷ by a number of preachers during the celebration of the Day of Harvest. The Baptist church calendar used to be identical with the secular calendar and began with New Year celebration which was followed by Christmas on January 6-8. However, in the early 2000s most Baptist Union churches in Belarus changed the former tradition and now celebrate Christmas in late December. This has produced a positive result in terms of transition from the secular to the ecclesiastical calendar. New Year receives less prominence than Christmas, and Christmas, in fact, becomes the first holiday of the coming year. So far Advent as a special four weeks before Christmas, has not found expression in the traditional worship of the churches in Belarus.⁵⁸⁸

Holidays continue with New Year,⁵⁸⁹ celebrating the “Orthodox” Christmas on January 6-8, often with a stronger emphasis on evangelism, followed by the Lord’s Baptism (January 19), The Meeting of the Lord (February 15), Annunciation Day (April 7) and the feasts related to Easter. Palm Sunday (in Russian literally Willow Sunday) is celebrated a week before Easter, then Holy Thursday (The Lord’s Passion in Gethsemane with the Lord’s Supper during an evening gathering), rarely Good Friday, then Easter,⁵⁹⁰ the Ascension, and the Day of Pentecost (Trinity Day).⁵⁹¹

In holiday seasons, especially those of Christmas and Easter, the number of services substantially increases. Christmas, Easter and Pentecost celebrations in many churches last two or three days (if the third day at Christmas time is a Sunday). A 1976 edition of *Bratskiy Vestnik* magazine mentions the third day of Christmas (January 9), the third day of Easter and Whit

⁵⁸⁶ Ivanov, *Dukhovnost' evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov*, p. 14.

⁵⁸⁷ Exod. 23:16.

⁵⁸⁸ *Nastol'naya kniga presvitera* [The Pastor’s Handbook], vol. 1 (Moskva: Izdanie Rossiiskogo soyuza evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov, 2010), pp. 286-291. This new Handbook does not even list the New Year as a celebration. Cf. “Tserkovnye prazdniki EKhB na 1976 God” [Church Feasts of the ECB for 1976], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 6 (1975), p. 75. This list begins with the New Year (January 1) and finishes with New Year Eve (December 31), following the secular calendar.

⁵⁸⁹ Most of the churches have worship services before the New Year (December 31 in the evening) and on the New Year Day (January 1 at midday or in the evening). As an example, in the Baptist church on Fortechnaya 61/1 in Brest, on New Year’s Eve the worship service lasts about three hours. It starts at 10 p.m., congregational prayer starts at about 11:55 p.m. and lasts 10-15 minutes. Believers therefore meet the beginning of the New Year on their knees. (Personal notes, p. 21.) People come to church looking back into the past they thank the Lord for all the blessings of the year, and ask for more blessings for the coming year. The New Year songs (*Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, nos. 612-620) are about the Second Coming of Christ, the transience of life, and close encounter with Christ.

⁵⁹⁰ This day churches gather at 10:00 – 11:00 a.m., as usual, but some churches change the time of worship. In the Baptist church on Fortechnaya 61/1 in Brest, on Easter Sunday morning the worship service starts at 6 a.m. (Personal notes, p. 21.)

⁵⁹¹ In the Western liturgical calendar, Trinity Sunday is the one after Pentecost, but for Belarusian Baptists it is the same Sunday and they use both names for the Holiday. Some Baptists in villages, especially in the south of Belarus, in line with the national custom for the day of Pentecost cut down some birch trees and display them for a few days in their yards. This remained so (from my personal experience) at least for the second half of the twentieth century. The celebration of Pentecost has incorporated this custom from the pagan celebration Semik, which had the cult of vegetation among its characteristics. (Mitrokhin, *Khristianstvo. Slovar'*, pp. 474-475.) Nowadays, the Orthodox Church has the practice of bringing flowers and greenery to the church as an expression of joy and gratitude to God.

Monday (the second day of Pentecost),⁵⁹² among the holidays. At the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century these feasts are hardly celebrated. Nevertheless, the number of public worship services can be significant, all the more so if we take the “week of prayer” into consideration, which takes place at the junction of the old and new years.⁵⁹³ Churches that follow this tradition hold prayer meetings every night for a week during the first days of the new year. Before the new year the Union of Churches sends the churches a prayer calendar, suggesting a prayer request for each day. For example, the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists declared 2013 to be the year of the family, so many of the prayer requests dealt with family life issues.⁵⁹⁴ The time of the junction of two years is a special period dedicated to being alert, even though numerous Christmas events and concerns do not always allow concentration on prayer. Yet committed church members try to attend all worship services so that during a period of sixteen days one could visit up to twenty services. However, this is the only time of the year when there are such a large number of meetings and it also results from “two” Christmases as well as New Year between them. Whatever day of the week Christmas or New Year fall on, Sunday services are never canceled.

Easter season is marked by less frequency, although there still may be eight services in

⁵⁹² “Tserkovnye Prazdniki EKHB na 1976 God,” p. 75.

⁵⁹³ The schedule of the church on Fortechnaya 61/1, Brest represents a typical example of the 2012-2013 holiday season in a large churches:

December 23 (Sunday) – a morning and an evening services.
 December 24 (Monday) – an evening service on “Western” Christmas Eve.
 December 25 (Tuesday) – a morning and an evening services on Christmas Day.
 December 26 (Wednesday) – a morning and an evening service on the second day of Christmas.
 December 27 (Thursday/Friday) – regular weekly prayer service.
 December 30 (Sunday) – a morning and an evening services.
 December 31 (Monday) – a Christmas Eve evening service.
 January 1 (Tuesday) – a New Year daytime service.
 January 2, 3, 4 (Wednesday to Friday) – prayer services every evening.
 January 6 (Sunday) – morning and evening services on “Orthodox” Christmas.
 January 7 (Monday) – morning and evening services which continue Christmas celebrations.

⁵⁹⁴ A reduced version of “Week of Prayer Program for 2013 in Baptist Churches in the Republic of Belarus” is as follows: December 30 (Sunday) – Prayer of praise, confession and forgiveness. Thank God for the Christian family, which He has established and continues to bless.

December 31 (Monday) – The prayer of gratitude for evangelism. Prayer for Christian families to be aware of evangelism, maturity of each member of the church, being faithful to the Great Commission and spreading the gospel to all people in Belarus.

January 1 (Tuesday) - Prayer for the Church. Prayer for all the ministers of the local churches and regional associations, and the leadership of the ECB Union in Belarus that they experience God's grace in its fullness in their personal and family life. Prayer for the financial ministry.

January 2 (Wednesday) – A prayer for our country, the world, and for the leaders. Prayer for the commitment of Christian spouses to biblical principles of fatherhood and motherhood. A prayer for the whole world, for Israel, and for the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

January 3 (Thursday) – Prayer for the family. Prayer for wisdom and patience in raising children and about both children and their parents being ready to minister to the Lord. Prayer for the non-Christian family members to be saved, and for believers to be passionately longing to live a pure and holy life.

January 4 (Friday) – Prayer to be ready to meet Christ.

January 5 (Saturday) - Prayer and thanksgiving for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Prayer for the unity of the people of God, the unity of our brotherhood and the unity of the churches.

nine days (Palm Sunday to Easter Monday).⁵⁹⁵ The importance of Easter is, however, especially reflected by the length of the season. Christmas motifs are gone in a week or two after Christmas. In contrast, Easter is remembered for forty days in many churches. On Easter day itself, besides the singing of the *troparion* by the congregation, the ministers greet participants with the words “Christ is risen!” This is usually repeated three times and the church responds each time by saying: “He is risen indeed!” Worship services continue to begin in this manner until Ascension.⁵⁹⁶

The Transfiguration is celebrated on August 19 in memory of the transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor, and it is, in fact, the last holiday of the yearly Baptist church calendar associated with the life of Christ here on earth. The celebration is not so important in comparison with Christmas and Easter. In the main collections of Christian hymns used in traditional worship there is only one hymn for this occasion “Tam na vershine ozarionnoi” (There, on the Illuminated Mountaintop).⁵⁹⁷

The importance of the celebrations for worship life can be measured by the number of songs in the collection that correspond to the event. In *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya* there is only one hymn for Ascension Day,⁵⁹⁸ and there are no hymns directly addressing the Lord's Baptism, The Meeting of the Lord,⁵⁹⁹ Annunciation Day, and Palm Sunday. Other hymns about Christ and life with Jesus are sung in church worship on these days. On the other hand, in the collection there are twenty-two songs for Christmas, twenty-two for Easter, twelve for the Day of Pentecost, nine for New Year and ten for the Day of Harvest.

The Day of Harvest or Harvest Festival (the name Thanksgiving Day is used occasionally) is celebrated in the fall.⁶⁰⁰ Harvest Festival summarises the fruit of a spiritual

⁵⁹⁵ An example of Easter services in “Light of Gospel,” Minsk in 2014:

April 13 (Palm Sunday) – a morning and an evening services.

April 17 (Thursday) – service with Lord's Supper in the evening.

April 19 (Saturday) – service in the evening (reading from the Gospels about Christ sufferings and death along with singing and praying).

April 20 (Easter Sunday) – services in the morning and in the evening.

April 21 (Easter Monday) - services in the morning and in the evening.

⁵⁹⁶ The forty-day period could be explained by Christ appearing to His disciples for forty days (Acts 1:3).

⁵⁹⁷ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 676. The song is a kind of Bible lesson about transfiguration and subsequent events. The author explains that in life, after the triumph of transfiguration the Christian should expect sorrow, temptations and hard work, but if Christ is in front of us we should have no doubt about the victory.

⁵⁹⁸ “O, kakoy nam put' otkrylsya” [Oh, what a way was opened for us], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 675. This song reveals the way of the Cross, the promise of the Holy Spirit and the main topic of the celebration is a return of Christ in glory:

He collected His apostles up on the mountain,

He was open for people to see when He ascended.

Suddenly two men appeared before them and said, “Jesus,

As He has ascended, and you have seen Him, He is coming back to judge.” (Third stanza.)

⁵⁹⁹ See footnote 380.

⁶⁰⁰ Prokhorov notes that this feast did not come from the Orthodox tradition, and “the Russian celebration was drawn from the tradition of German Baptists and Mennonites” (Prokhorov, “Russian Baptist and Orthodoxy, 1960-1990: A Comparative Study of Theology, Liturgy, and Traditions,” p. 202). Prokhorov refers to P.M. Friesen, *Die*

harvest and thus closes the yearly holiday cycle very appropriately. This celebration provides an abundance of topics on various aspects of Christian life: gratitude for the harvest and spiritual blessings, encouragement to engage in activity (primarily to save the lost), spiritual sowing and harvest in Christian life, the Second Coming and God's judgment. On this day there is a tradition, especially in rural areas, of offering an abundant meal to every attendee. Guests may be invited from other communities. Usually Harvest Festival is celebrated on the last Sunday of September, but may be moved to another Sunday in October or even to the beginning of November in order to visit other churches or invite guests.

In Soviet times, churches celebrated another holiday in the fall: the so-called “Day of Unity.” It was originally established in 1945 in memory of the historic merger of the two brotherly movements, the Evangelical Christians and Baptists, into a single Union in the fall of 1944.⁶⁰¹ In 1953 the editorial of *Bratskiy Vestnik* wrote, “We announce that two dear celebrations, such as the Fest of Harvest and the Day of Unity, are established this year: the first one on Sunday, September 27, and the second one on Sunday, October 25.”⁶⁰² With the collapse of the AUCECB in 1992⁶⁰³ and the formation of separate unions in the newly independent states, the Day of Unity began to lose its place in the church calendar, and is hardly mentioned in Belarusian churches in the early twenty-first century.⁶⁰⁴

Currently, the focus on Christian holidays except Christmas and Easter is weakening, especially in large cities. When the celebration of the Meeting of the Lord—commemoration of the presentation of Christ in the Temple—falls on a working day, only two churches, “Light of Gospel” and “Golgotha”, of the seventeen Baptist churches in Minsk celebrate that holiday. The churches outside of Minsk and churches in the country are more zealous in holding to Christian celebrations, since they have a strong tradition and a large stratum of older believers who have free time, value traditions and cannot justify any work on holidays.⁶⁰⁵

High regard for the celebrations can play an important role in enriching the practice of worship. First of all, they become a kind of compass, pointing to Christ, and the redemptive acts of God in Christ; they take us on a walk with Christ throughout a year from His birth to His

Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland (1789-1910) im Rahmen der Mennonitischen Gesamtgeschichte (Halbstadt, Taurien: Raduga, 1910), pp. 422, 561.

⁶⁰¹ *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 3 (1948).

⁶⁰² *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 2-3 (1953).

⁶⁰³ In fact, AUCECB was reorganized into the Euro-Asian Federation of ECB unions, but the main leadership functions of AUCECB were delegated to the national Baptist Unions. EAF has only a role in coordination and serves to connect the unions in the Commonwealth of Independent States.

⁶⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the Day of Unity is mentioned in a new Pastor's Handbook, published by the Russian Baptist Union. On this day the churches are called to talk about the “spiritual unity of all Christians, local churches and regional unions that make together ECB Russian Union” (*Nastol'naya kniga presvitera*, vol. 1, p. 291).

⁶⁰⁵ From my personal experience (as I grew up in a village and regularly visit churches in villages) commitment to resting from work applies particularly to people in rural areas. Even if it is a working day, on Christian holidays they try not to do work publicly in their fields and gardens. They perform only the most necessary steps to care for the cattle and the house, lest they should offend the Orthodox people.

ascension. They also present a whole picture of His ministry and Himself, as the observance of the Christian year is “a celebration not of what Christ did or said, but of Christ himself,”⁶⁰⁶ (and, indeed of the Trinity as, for example, in the Lord’s Baptism or Pentecost). Secondly, preparation for the celebrations and relating them to each other may provide a framework for organizing Bible reading and preaching. However, in traditional Baptist churches the yearly cycle of festivals is not associated with lectionaries or any other scheme for systematic reading of the Bible. Thus much of the potential of the festival seasons is lost, as are opportunities for systematic training and spiritual preparation for celebrations.⁶⁰⁷ In that sense, Baptists in Belarus have yet to rediscover the importance of time and seasons, and to move to a richer Christian calendar that can serve as a catalyst to worship renewal.⁶⁰⁸

5.4. The use of space in public worship

5.4.1. Houses of prayer: status and place in worship⁶⁰⁹

It would be reasonable to assume that Baptist houses of prayer reflect the spirit of Baptist approaches to public worship, and that an examination of their design and composition can provide insight into the role, meaning, and components of worship.⁶¹⁰ However, the space in which traditional Baptist worship takes place has not yet been analyzed or critiqued, neither on the church level nor or as an element of theological education in Belarus and for this reason, the rest of this chapter pays significantly more attention to examining this particular issue. In the Russian-speaking environment within the last three decades only two major articles on this topic have been published—both of them in the *Bogomyslie* journal.⁶¹¹ Perhaps, this is due to the fact,

⁶⁰⁶ Benjamin Gordon-Taylor, “Time,” in *The Study of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. Juliette Day and Benjamin Gordon-Taylor (Collegeville: A Pueblo Book, 2013): 113.

⁶⁰⁷ Before Christmas and Easter churches spend much time in advertizing meetings, the preparation of music programs, evangelistic and social projects. On the other hand, Evangelicals have rejected Lent since it is not seen to be prescribed by the New Testament. Moreover, Lent was understood as a part of Orthodox rites which contradict the doctrine on salvation by faith. For example, Pashkovtsy’s evangelical confession states that “only the righteousness of Christ justifies us by faith in the eyes of God, and not Lent, charity, bows to the ground or any other kinds of acts. Even though good works are inseparable from the true and living faith they can neither meet the requirements of the Law of God about sins nor they can save us.” (<http://slavicbaptists.com/2012/06/01/pashkavconfession/>, last accessed 16 May 2019).

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. James F. White, “A Protestant Worship Manifesto,” *The Christian Century* (January 27, 1982): 84.

⁶⁰⁹ See photos of houses of prayer, worship halls, and decorations in the worship halls in Appendix 2.

⁶¹⁰ Nigel Yates provides a good overview of the interrelationships between theology and the structure of church buildings, as well as their history in the various denominations. Nigel Yates, *Liturgical Space. Christian Worship and Church Buildings in Western Europe 1500-2000* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008).

⁶¹¹ Vl. S. Ryaguzov, “O tserkovnoi arkhitekture” [On Ecclesiastical Architecture] and L. Golodetsky, “Kakim byt’ domu molitvy” [What Should the House of Prayer Be Like], *Bogomyslie* [Contemplation of God], no. 1 (1990): 250-261 and 262-266. The first author is himself a professional architect. In 2016 and 2017 *Bogomyslie* published articles by Ivan Gutsul. In the first article Gutsul discusses Christian symbolism in protestant architecture in Ukraine, and the second article contains a brief overview of the approaches to building houses of prayer in church history. See Ivan Gutsul, “Khristianskaya simvolika v sakral’noi arkhitekture protestantov Ukrainy – visual’noe

that in the Soviet time churches had extremely limited opportunities to build any houses of prayer.⁶¹² Only in 1980 was permission granted to rebuild a modified private home which had been the only Baptist prayer house existing in the capital of the country, Minsk, prior to the 1990s (Appendix 2.1.16).⁶¹³ The house of prayer in Brest, Fortechnaya 61/1, was built in 1986 (Appendix 2.1.2; Figure 2).⁶¹⁴ It became the first specialized cult building after the Second World War owned by Baptists in Belarus. In 1987 the church in Gomel received permission to build a new house of prayer. Its construction was completed in 1990.⁶¹⁵

New opportunities suddenly caught believers by surprise, and in a massive push for construction and acquisition of houses of prayer, enthusiasm preceded theological considerations.⁶¹⁶ Each congregation made individual decisions on construction which were based on pragmatic, legal and financial opportunities, or guarantees by donors, on professional

vyrazheniye dukhovnosti veruyushchikh” [Christian Symbolism in Protestant Sacred Architecture in Ukraine – The Visual Expression of the Spirituality of Believers], *Bogomyslie* [Contemplation of God], no. 17 (2016): 327-345; “Molitvennyy dom – sakral'nyy khram ili mnogofunktsional'nyy kompleks?” [Is the House of Prayer a Sacral Temple or a Multifunctional Complex?], *Bogomyslie* [Contemplation of God], no.19 (2016): 73-95. In the last section of the second article the author describes “modern protestant temples in Ukraine.”

⁶¹² For example, since October 1948 and until the end of Stalin’s rule, 100% of the appeals by Christians to let them open a house of prayer were declined. (A.V. Sinichkin, *Vlast' i sluzhiteli tserkvi na etape formirovaniya VSEKHB (s 1944-go po 1949 g.). Traditsiya podgotovki sluzhiteley v bratstve evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov. Istoriya i perspektivy: Sbornik statey* [Authorities and church officials at the stage of AUCECB formation (from 1944 to 1949). The tradition of training of ministers in the brotherhood of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. History and prospects: Collected papers] (Moskva: Rossiiskiy soyuz evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov, 2013): 162.) In the first third of the 20th century, the situation was more favorable (see 4.3.1.), even though the number of houses of prayer was very limited. In 1912 there was a house of prayer in the center of Minsk. (*Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, p. 83.) The first worship service in Slutsk was held in a Calvinist church, and in 1924 a house of prayer was built there. One poor brother donated a cow to build the house and this inspired other Christians. (Ibid., p. 385.) In Brest the Christians gathered in the basement, then they rented a theater hall and in 1926 they built a house of prayer. Around the same time small houses of prayer were built in Pinsk and Grodno. (Ibid., pp. 389, 391.)

⁶¹³ Kanatush, “Istoriya evangel'skogo dvizheniya v Belarusi,” p. 18. From March 1942 the church held its worship services in a former fish warehouse in Nyamiha str., 2 in downtown Minsk. In 1965 the government decided to use the area for the construction of Dom Mod (Fashion House) and the church acquired an unfinished house on the outskirts of Minsk. The Baptists finished the building at their own expense, but according to the decision of the City Council no. 46 on 18 February 1965, the building was legally taken away from the church, and then the church was allowed to rent it from the local authorities. When the church became a legal entity in 1990, much effort was required to acquire the documents for the building. Officially, it became church property only in 1999, after many appeals and negotiations.

⁶¹⁴ Klopot, “Bozh'e voditelstvo,” p. 15.

⁶¹⁵ Navitski, *Jevanhielskija chryscijanie u Bielarusi: piat' stahoddziau historyi (1517-2017 hh.)*, p. 357. When the church in Gomel received permission it had three hundred and fifty-five members. For thirty-six years, the worship services had taken place in an expanded private home. From the Second World War to the early 1990s almost all the churches gathered in private homes or private homes converted for worship. There was lack of space especially in urban areas. In a letter to the Commissioner on Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the Byelorussian SSR written on 30 June 1966, the believers of another community in Voolka Podgorodskaya, Brest complained about their lack of space. In effect the area of the house of prayer was 60 sq.m., and an extra 20 sq.m. in an extension without any heating. That church had four hundred members, excluding *priblizhionnye*. (NARB, Stock 952, File 3, Case 21, pp. 141-142.) The term *priblizhionnye* denotes adult believers, attending church for a long time (several years), but who have not yet been baptized, and so are not church members.

⁶¹⁶ By 2012 seven buildings were built in Minsk and the Minsk district by churches in the Union of Baptist Churches in Belarus (“Bethlehem,” “Light of Gospel,” “Light of Truth,” “Revival,” Minsk; churches in Churilovich, Machulishchi, and Zaslavl’, Minsk district), six buildings bought and renovated (“Beam of Hope,” “Good News,” “Nativity,” Minsk; churches in Gatovo, Sokol, and Zhdanovich, Minsk district), and six other houses of prayer were in the process of construction (“Resurrection” and “Sun of Righteousness” in Minsk; churches in Borovliany, Kolodishchi, Ratomka, Yuhnovka, Minsk district).

training, and on individual preferences. Pastors were often personally involved in the construction, endeavouring to compensate the lack of experience with enthusiasm. Many new churches bought private residences for remodeling, adding additional space, removing or altering some walls to create a worship hall, and so forth. Such new buildings generally preserved the architecture of the residence they had replaced.⁶¹⁷ In other instances, the buildings reflected the creative work of non-Christian architects whose primary concern may have been the outward appeal of the building without considering its functional role for worship as well as the theological significance of particular architectural arrangements.⁶¹⁸ As an exception to the rule, however, the “Ark” church building in Volkovysk, Grodno region, is worthy of attention, since the architect tried to present it in the form of an ark (Appendix 2.1.34; Figure 5).⁶¹⁹ Later, the extension of the church ministry along with acquaintance with the architecture of Western churches contributed to constructing several multifunctional complexes which contain a hall, Sunday school classrooms, a canteen, a hall for church celebrations and offices.⁶²⁰ Thus, as noted in relation to other evangelical churches, “the gathering places can range from simple meetinghouses to elaborate buildings.”⁶²¹

Theological uncertainty about church architecture is one of the aspects pointing to the minor role of church buildings in Baptist belief and worship compared to the Russian Orthodox church. Tatyana Nikol'skaya draws attention to the fact that during the Soviet era Orthodox communities often ceased to exist after authorities closed their church building, whilst Protestants adjusted more easily to the new conditions. Their services did not require specially equipped facilities or special liturgical objects, other than the Bible.⁶²² Such an approach to worship is reflected in the Baptist reference to “the gathered church.”⁶²³ The primary interest of

⁶¹⁷ Churches in Jackshitsy (Appendix 2.1.5; Figure 3), Molodechno, Zhodino, Minsk region (Appendix 2.1.20, and 2.1.40); churches in Voropaevo, Vitebsk region (Appendix 2.1.36; Figure 4); Stebrovo, Brest region (Appendix 2.1.29); Kalinkovich, Gomel region (Appendix 2.1.6), and others.

⁶¹⁸ “Light of Gospel,” Minsk (Appendix 2.1.17; Figure 7); “Salvation” in Kolodishchi, Minsk region (Appendix 2.1.9a and 2.1.9b). In fact, ministers were involved in the decision-making. In 2012, “faith”-based decisions of former pastors in “Resurrection” church, Minsk and “Salvation” in Kolodishchi, Minsk region resulted in the sale of an unfinished building of “Resurrection” church after eleven years of construction, since there were no finances or prospects for continuing the construction. “Salvation” church is still in the process of construction after fifteen years.

⁶¹⁹ See Houses of Prayer by the same architect in Appendix 2.1.7; Figure 8, 2.1.34; Figure 5, and 2.1.9a, 2.1.9b.

⁶²⁰ Churches “Bethlehem” and “Light of Truth” in Minsk (Appendix 2.1.15; Figure 9 and 2.1.18); “Hope” in Grodno (Appendix 2.1.4a and 2.1.4b); “Salvation” in Brest (Appendix 2.1.41.2a and 2.1.41.2b). In the latter the worship hall is transformed into a gym (Appendix 2.2.13a and 2.2.13c). It is a unique case among the churches in Belarus.

⁶²¹ James J. Stamoolis, ed., *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p. 23.

⁶²² Nikol'skaya, *Russkiy Protestantism i gosudarstvennaya vlast' v 1905-1991 godakh*, p. 37.

⁶²³ Brian Haymes, “Theology and Baptist Identity,” in *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way*, ed. Paul S. Fiddes, ed., Brian Haymes, Richard L. Kidd, Michael Quicke (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 2000): 2. Keith Jones posed legitimate theological objections to the use of this term in favour of ‘gathering community’, see his “Towards a Model of Mission for Gathering, Intentional, Convictional Koinonia,” *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 4:2

Baptists was in opportunities to assemble and worship rather than in a building or its status, for the church is “where two or three are gathered together in my name,”⁶²⁴ as expressed in the following hymn:

Not a temple covered with gold
Not a circle of chosen men
The Church of Christ is a congregation of
People redeemed by the cross.⁶²⁵

Evangelical Christians also argued against the splendor of church buildings. Magnificent decoration and ornamentation of cathedrals was interpreted as an obvious deviation from the simplicity of Gospel teaching and the nature of God who does not need such buildings:

Israel, you're trying to earn my endorsement
With shining temples full of icons
Full of glittering and tinsel, incense burnt,
Where day and night, the lights are on.
What should I do with pompous works?
Soulless stone is dust of the earth.
I created the waters and the sun,
I by hand draw the skyline.⁶²⁶

To justify this position, it was not only the Bible that was employed,⁶²⁷ but also historic interpretations:

From the time of Emperor Constantine, the Christian church began to rapidly fall astray from the teaching of Christ. . . . For some people the glitter of gold became more precious than the light of teaching of Christ.

(January 2004): 5-13. Also, Parush R. Parushev “Gathered, Gathering, Porous: Reflections on the nature of baptistic community,” *Baptistic Theologies*, volume 5, no. 1 (Spring, 2013): 35-52.

⁶²⁴ Matt. 18:20.

⁶²⁵ “Ne hram, ne zolotoye zdanie” [Not a Temple Covered with Gold], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 252. Text by I.S. Prokhanov.

Negative attitudes towards Orthodoxy is clearly stated here. The lyrics and words of the song below hint at the fact that Evangelicals thought Orthodox practices unscriptural:

My God doesn't live in churches with crosses
Where incense and candles emit fumes.
My God searches for acceptance and simplicity
As well as passionate love to lighten the gloom.
God is watching over everything,
Fields and forests are His dome,
To all He gives deliverance from sin,
Humans' hearts He makes His home...

My God dwells not in temples, I know,
He's inside me; before the King I bow.
His love embraces me and further flows
To warm and lighten weary souls...

(Poem “Moi Bog” [My God], *Stikhotvoreniya, declamatsii, istorii*, fourth, fifth, and sixteenth stanzas.)

⁶²⁶ Hymn “Israil', moi narod, vnimai!” [Israel, My People, Hearken!], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 125, Second and third stanzas. Originally published in *Vestnik dukhovnykh khristian-molokan* [The Journal of Spiritual Christians Molokans], no. 1-2 (1925), p. 19. The author of the poem is the Russian poet-theologian A.S. Khomyakov (1804-1860). When he refers to “the new Israel”, he is speaking of the church of his own day.

⁶²⁷ John 4:24; Acts 7:48-50.

. . . In order to please wealthy and famous parishioners, who were in essence pagans, the Christian temples were being decorated with much splendor and glitter in the same manner as pagan ones. . . . But following pagan examples Christians started to worship their temples, considering them to be holy. They began to decorate them with gold, silver and stone and worship this manufacture of human hands.⁶²⁸

Thus, the evangelical houses of prayer are valued above all from a practical point of view. And if worship services continue to be held in converted houses or in homes of the pastor's family,⁶²⁹ the situation prompts a purely utilitarian approach to the building and its function. The house of prayer must encourage the edification of believers, provide space for fellowship, and meet evangelistic purposes. Orderly from the outside and modestly decorated inside, buildings are seen to develop positive attitudes among and toward Baptists, and to encourage visitors to return.⁶³⁰ The place of worship should promote "the spiritual mood to think about biblical truths and create an atmosphere of prayer."⁶³¹ It is therefore preferable to have a specialized building, but if such does not exist, a congregation can meet in different premises. In fact, starting in the 1990s, over a period of about fifteen years, a number of Baptist churches rented lecture halls, cultural centers, clubs, cinemas, educational establishments, and back rooms.⁶³² Room composition, furniture, acoustics, time and cost of the renting premises could be seen as a disadvantage. But no theological arguments were raised against using secular rooms.

⁶²⁸ Somov, "Tserkov' Khrista i ego Svyashchenstvo," p. 60.

⁶²⁹ Rudensk, Sokol, Zhdanovichy (Appendix 2.1.39), Minsk region and others.

⁶³⁰ Compare this with an understanding of beauty in the Orthodox theology as a reflection of the glory of God. See Serge Bulgakov, *Pravoslavie* [Orthodoxy] (Moskva: AST, 2003), p. 243; and Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, pp. 29-30.

⁶³¹ Ivanov, *Dukhovnost' evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov*, p.17.

⁶³² After the new edition of the Law "On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations" came into force on November 16, 2002, it has become more difficult to rent public buildings.



Fig.2. Photograph of Fortechnaya 61/1 church building, Brest.



Fig.3. Photograph of Jackshitsy house of prayer, Minsk region.



Fig.4. Photograph of Voropaevo house of prayer, Vitebsk region.



Fig.5. Photograph of the “Arc,” house of prayer, Volkovysk, Grodno region.

The utilitarian attitude, however, is in tension with the idea of the sacredness of a building where appearance sometimes may be more important than functionality. The ideas around buildings holding elements of sacredness are likely derived from the Orthodox environment, and perhaps accepted more readily in situations where any historical and ongoing conflict with Orthodoxy is perceived less sharply. As opportunities became available, some churches have been able to build magnificent purpose-built structures, preferring respectful appearance to the notion of “inexpensive church.”⁶³³ This alternative theological vision is reflected in a new Baptist terminology: large houses of prayer that are sometimes called, following the Orthodox pattern, “temples.”⁶³⁴ This would suggest evidence of the influence of Orthodox theology and cultural expressions, coupled with Old Testament worship imagery. Practically, this lofty terminology also reflects an awareness and awe of the Lord’s presence. During worship even the least appealing building becomes “a temple.”⁶³⁵

When you walk into the house of God
 Throw away your anxiety and watch your heart and feet,
 So as to hear, to hear the Word of God.
 This place is holy, sacred is place here,
 This is the house of God, the house of God.
 This is the house of God, sacred is place here.
 This is the house of God, sacred is place here,
 This is the house of God, here are the gates of heaven...
 Throw away your anxiety, heed the words of Christ.⁶³⁶

⁶³³ Cherenkov, *Litsom k litsu*, p. 75.

⁶³⁴ “Light of Gospel” and “Bethlehem,” Minsk (Appendix 2.1.15; Figure 7 and 2.1.17; Figure 9); “Salvation” church in Kolodishchi, Minsk region (Appendix 2.1.9a and 2.1.9b); central Baptist church in Kobrin, Brest region (Appendix 2.1.8; Figure 6); church on Fortechynaya 61/1, Brest (Appendix 2.1.2; Figure 2).

Indeed, even a small house of prayer could be referred to in the same manner because it also is a place where God dwells among the believers. A pastor in his opening prayer of public worship might pray “I thank you, Lord, for being able to come into Your temple,” as was the case in a church in Berezino, Minsk region. (Personal visit of the author to the church service, 7 January 2009 [Personal notes, p. 88b].) Such prayers are not uncommon from the mouths of traditional Evangelicals. A text in the worship hall in the rather small house of prayer in Shatsk, Minsk region reads: “That Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day,” taken from 1 Kings 8:29, translation from the Russian Synodal Bible (Appendix 2.3.10.2).

⁶³⁵ Schmemmann analyzes the “transposition” of the idea of the temple at the beginning of Christianity. In his opinion the role of the building was instrumental (as the place of gathering) in the pre-Constantine Church. He claims that “The church building was gradually freed from subordination to its ecclesiological meaning, acquired its own independent significance, and the center of attention was shifted from the Church assembled and realized within it to the church building itself, as in fact a sanctified building or sanctuary.” (Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* [Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996], pp. 113-114.)

⁶³⁶ *Notny sbornik dukhovnykh pesen* [Music collection of spiritual songs], vol. 3, part 1 (Moskva: Vsesoyuznyy sovet evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov, 1988), no. 11.

The notion of the sacredness of a house of prayer is expressed in a special service after the completion of the construction, or a reconstruction of a newly acquired building, a service of “consecration” or “dedication” of the house of prayer. The text in 1 Kings 8 relating the story of the dedication of the first temple is often recited during such a service as the congregation prays that the glory of the Lord may fill “this temple” and that the name of the Lord may be glorified in this place through church ministry and the conversion of unbelievers. The pastors and senior pastors raise their hands as they say a special prayer of blessing and dedication. During the consecration of a rather small church building in Volozhin, Minsk region, sermons and prayers contained such words and phrases as “temple,” “holy place,” and “Your home”. (Personal visit of the author to the ministers’ meeting, 14 October 2012.) Indeed, the Baptist doctrine of faith in Belarus considers the consecration of the house of prayer to be a sacred rite (*Verouchenie evangel’skikh khristian baptistov v Belarusi, prinyatoye na s’ezde EKhB v Belarusi 15.03.2003 goda*.

The concept of a house of prayer as a place where God is especially present can sometimes lead to unexpected problems and discussions. For example, is it permissible to have lavatories or a table-tennis table in the house of prayer? Can non-Christian neighbors borrow benches from a house of prayer for use in a wedding? In the latter case, the congregation thus asked may refuse the request, believing that benches of the house of prayer should not be used in situations where people would drink alcohol and so bring dishonor to the Lord.⁶³⁷ A House of prayer belongs to God as it is called “My House,” and it needs more care than a private house, It is also understood to be different from other types of buildings. Ivan Gutsul, a modern Ukrainian art critic, believes that “the house of prayer, where the community of believers gets together, should . . . dominate over other buildings by its architectural spiritual symbolism. . . [it should not lose its] ‘sacral spirit.’”⁶³⁸

The status of “the Lord’s house” demands a corresponding attitude in design and decoration. Large, wealthy congregations, especially in south-western Belarus, as along with the central Baptist church “Golgotha” in Minsk (Appendix 2.2.4.1, 2.2.4.2, and 2.2.4.3), creatively decorate their church space with refined ornaments, paintings, carved balustrades, original light fixtures, engravings, mosaic floors, stained glass, and so on.⁶³⁹ These buildings also display calligraphically written or sculptured Scripture texts; modeled, carved or embroidered pictures of an open Bible, cups and loaves of bread, grapes or the cross; paintings of nature which occupy almost the entire front wall;⁶⁴⁰ or paintings on the ceiling.⁶⁴¹ The onlookers may observe that while the ornate beauty of Orthodoxy is avoided in favor of more simplicity in Baptist houses of

[Doctrine of Faith of Evangelical Christian Baptists in Belarus, adopted at the Congress of ECB in Belarus 15.03.2003], Unpublished material, 8.1). Consecration of the house of prayer is a regular worship with solemn congratulations and one special feature – the ministers say a prayer with their hands lifted up.

⁶³⁷ Related by a guest preacher from the Ukraine with regard to the service in church on Fortechnaya 61/1, Brest, 12 October 2008. It is interesting to make a comparison with the rules of the Orthodox church, such as, “the temples should not be robbed and turned into regular dwelling and a transformed one should be restored...” or “one should not eat and sleep inside the temple.” (*Kniga Pravil svyatykh apostolov, svyatykh Soborov Vselenskikh i pomestnykh i svyatykh otsov* [The Book of the Rules of the Holy Apostles, the Saints of the Ecumenical and Local and Holy Fathers], Moskva, 2004). Cited in E.Y. Verhovih, “Kanon v Arkhitekture pravoslavnoy tserkvi” [Canon in Architecture of the Orthodox Church] *Akademicheskiiy vestnik Uralniiprojekt RAASN* [Academic Bulletin of Uralniiprojekt RAASH], no. 4 (2010): 27.

⁶³⁸ Gutsul, “Molitvennyy dom – sakral'nyy khram ili mnogofunktsional'nyy kompleks?” p. 94. Gutsul refers to Matt. 5:14 among other references, groundlessly applying the image of the city on the hill to a church building.

⁶³⁹ The standard of life of evangelical Christians in the south-west of Belarus is higher than in Belarus in general, as reflected in the number and quality of private cars in the church parking lots. Being so close to the border with Poland contributes to the development of cross-border trade and other kinds of business. Those living in the capital of Minsk enjoy better financial life than in the other regions, since the main sources of income are from within the city and the labor market is developed.

⁶⁴⁰ Church in Man'kovichi and church on Mopra, Pinsk, Brest region (Appendix 2.2.24a; Figure 15 and 2.2.30).

⁶⁴¹ Church in Man'kovichi, Brest region (Appendix 2.2.24a and 2.2.24b; Figure 15); church in Shatsk, Minsk region (Appendix 2.2.35a and 2.2.35b; Figure 18); central Baptist church in Gomel (Appendix 2.2.1.1; Figure 19).

prayer,⁶⁴² some churches nevertheless no longer perceive stark simplicity as their guiding principle, and only financial limitations restrain their zeal.

Thus, two visions of church buildings seem to exist among Baptists of Belarus: a utilitarian structure on the one hand and the church building as a temple on the other. The historical development of Baptist identity in the region requires simplicity in relation to the house of prayer and focusses on the people, not the building.⁶⁴³ At the same time the influence of the Orthodox environment, personal convictions of some pastors and believers, and ability of the church to now acquire plots and build leads to the construction of “temples” which the church may later struggle to maintain.⁶⁴⁴ In turn, the presence of grand buildings brings temple-terminology back to life. Thus, the two theological approaches coexist and it seems that is only the political and economic situation that currently bring any correctives either in constraining meetings within the house church model or in restraining the practical implementation of a larger, church building vision.

⁶⁴² Mark J. Harris, *Toward an Understanding of Russian Baptist Worship* (Portland: CMC International, 1997), p. 6.

⁶⁴³ At the consecration of houses of prayer preachers often repeat such texts as the following: “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.” (Acts. 17:24); “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Cor. 6:19).

⁶⁴⁴ Houses of prayer in Divin (Appendix 2.1.3) and Kamenets, Brest region; Volok (Appendix 2.1.35) and Chalevichi, Minsk region. In the last two there were no worship services during the winter of 2012-2013 since the churches consisted of small groups of retired people who were not able to pay the heating bills when the prices dramatically increased. The members gathered for worship in a small house of prayer belonging to another church in the neighborhood or they worshipped in the houses of the church members.

It is important to mention that financial opportunities and low energy prices were not the only reasons for building houses of prayer that proved to be too big. It was also due to the enthusiasm associated with a significant influx of people into the church in 1990. At present, the inflow has lessened, and many villages are dying out as young people leave for the cities.



Fig.6. Photograph of Central Baptist church, Kobrin, Brest region.



Fig.7. Photograph of “Light of Gospel” church building, Minsk.



Fig.8. Photograph of “Bethany” church building, Kobrin, Brest region.



Fig.9. Photograph of “Bethlehem” church building, Minsk.

5.4.2. The language of the interior

Turning to the worship hall specifically, we will begin with a particularly notable feature: the “sacramentalisation” of walls decorated with biblical texts. Such designs are especially customary in villages and small towns.⁶⁴⁵ In contrast to the emphasis on Christ the Almighty, the Pantocrator, in Orthodox church design, a particularly common Scripture text is a fragment of 1 John 4:8 or 4:16—“God is love.” This text is often displayed in large letters on the front wall of the worship hall. The intent is to shape the context of worship,⁶⁴⁶ while another text, “We preach Christ crucified”⁶⁴⁷ explains the aim and purpose of the worship service. In contrast to the cult of

⁶⁴⁵ Liuban', Minsk region (Appendix 2.3.5; Figure 17); Svyatopolka, Golovchitsy, Drogichin (2.3.3), Zavelev'e (Appendix 2.3.12; Figure 13) Brest region. There are six texts in the house of prayer in Liuban' —Matt. 11:28; 2 Cor. 1:23; John 3:16; Rev. 22:7; John 8:11 and “God is love” on the front wall. On 13 May 2012, the church in Drogichin consecrated a new house of prayer. Hereinafter, the data relating to the church in this thesis describes their former building, which had been functioning up until that time.

⁶⁴⁶ “Golgotha” in Minsk (Appendix 2.2.4.1; Figure 16); central Baptist church in Gomel (Appendix 2.2.1.1); church in Man'kovichi (on the signboard of the house of prayer) and Pruzhany, Brest region (Appendix 2.1.14 and 2.2.31; Figure 12); Machulishchi, Mar'ina Gorka, Molodechno, Soligorsk, Minsk region (Appendix 2.2.22, 2.2.3.2, 2.2.26, and 2.2.36).

⁶⁴⁷ I Cor. 1:23-24. Church in Voolka, Brest (Appendix 2.3.13); churches in Pruzhany, Voolka, Luninets district, and Zavelev'e, Brest region (Appendix 2.2.31, 2.2.39, and 2.3.12.1); churches in Machulishchi and Slutsk (on the pulpit), Minsk region (Appendix 2.2.22 and 2.2.6.5). Its broader version is “We preach Christ [who was] crucified, resurrected and [is] coming again.” As in the Central Baptist church in Kobrin, churches in Drogichin, Malech, Brest region (Appendix 2.2.1, 2.3.3.1, and 2.2.23a); church “House of Gospel” in Vitebsk (Appendix

the saints and Mary in the Orthodox tradition, the message being conveyed here is that the focus of worship and preaching is to be Christ. The same focus is also reflected in the inscription “And behold, I come quickly,”⁶⁴⁸ indicating an expectation of Christ’s Second Coming. Closely connected to this eschatological emphasis is the call to repentance: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”⁶⁴⁹ Other Scripture texts bring the elements of praise and enthusiasm to the notion of worship by inviting all to praise and give all glory to the Lord (such as Psalm 19:1, Psalm 29:1b, Psalm 146:1, or Rev. 14:7).⁶⁵⁰

An assumption can be discerned here that God’s Word has an ability to change people without further explanation, preaching, or commentary: a soundless sermon can touch people’s hearts even before the worship service starts.⁶⁵¹ Each person present at worship can learn about God’s love, repent of sins, receive salvation through our crucified and resurrected Christ, and glorify the Lord for salvation. The transforming character of the worship service is revealed in the possibility for a person to return home as a new being. “Go your way. From now on, sin no more”⁶⁵² is often written above the exit, which serves as a warning, reminding the participants of worship of an inseparable connection between worship services and life.

In addition to the Scriptures usually permanently on view, temporary, seasonal texts may also be displayed. “For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord;” “For to us a child will be born, a son will be given; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace,”⁶⁵³ and similar texts mark Christmas. On the Day of Harvest, “Observe

2.3.24); central Baptist church in Gomel (Appendix 2.2.1); church “Hope” in Grodno (Appendix 2.2.15a); church in Liuban’, Vileika district, Minsk region (Appendix 2.2.21). In Drogichin and Molodechno the text is carved in the pulpit.

⁶⁴⁸ Rev. 22:7. Central Baptist church in Kobrin and church in Malech, Brest region (Appendix 2.3.4.2 and 2.3.16; Picture 9); church in Ilich, Gomel region (on the pulpit) (Appendix 2.2.16).

⁶⁴⁹ Mark 1:15. Also Hosea 10:12, Matt. 11:28. Church in Malech, Brest region (Appendix 2.2.23a); church on Fortechnaya 61/1, Brest (Appendix 2.3.2.1); church in Mar’ina Gorka, Minsk region (Appendix 2.3.7.4).

⁶⁵⁰ “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands;” “Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength;” “Praise the Lord, O my soul!” “Fear God, and give Him glory.” (Appendix 2.3.6.1, 2.3.21, 2.3.3.4, and 2.3.8.4).

Some of the texts are found in singular variants. The church in Molodechno displays the text, “To guide [sic] our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:79). (Appendix 2.2.8.5). This particular Scripture text survived in the house of a church member during the many years when the Soviet authorities abolished all the texts which referred to anything “religious,” such as a call to repentance, or in which the name of God was mentioned.⁶⁵⁰ This particular text was written in such a way that it did not formally represent a threat to the authorities; on the contrary, it spoke about peace, a theme which was very popular with the Soviet regime. (Victor Butrovich, Pastor of Molodechno Baptist church, personal interview with the author, Molodechno, 20 April 2012 [Personal notes, p. 88b].)

⁶⁵¹ Decoration and painting in the Orthodox church also preach to those who can understand this sermon. In the words of Archpriest Alexei Vasin, “When I enter church, I enter the Bible.” (“Round table,” organized by Minsk Theological Seminary on 13 October 2016.)

⁶⁵² John 8:11. Churches in Drogichin, Malech, Brest region; churches in Liuban’, Mar’ina Gorka, Minsk region (Appendix 2.3.3.2, 2.2.23b, 2.3.5.5, and 2.3.7.2).

⁶⁵³ Luke 2:11; Isa. 9:6. Church “Light of Gospel,” Minsk (Appendix 2.3.17a and 2.3.17b). See also Matt. 1:23b in “Quiet Haven” church in Bobruisk, Mogilev region (Appendix 2.2.10b).

the Feast of the Harvest” may be exhibited.⁶⁵⁴ At the celebrations of the New Year, a church anniversary, or sanctification of the house of prayer, “Thus far the LORD has helped us” would be another popular decoration.⁶⁵⁵ These Scriptures are *sui generis* justification for the centrality of the Bible in traditional Baptist worship.

The tradition of decorating houses of prayer with biblical texts goes back to the beginning of the evangelical movement in Belarus,⁶⁵⁶ starting with the believers’ houses where worship services were held. Even today, in the “red corner” (the corner of the sitting room opposite the entrance and between the windows, where there would be a cross and/or an icon in an Orthodox household) elderly Christians often display the text, “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”⁶⁵⁷—a clear indication of the disapproval of the Orthodox practice. It would be much easier to place a framed Scripture on a wall but, located in the corner where it replaces an icon, the reference to worshipping in spirit and in truth explains the absence of an icon. Such artefacts, however, could also gain an “iconic” value themselves.⁶⁵⁸ The zeal in filling the house or apartment with Scriptures could possibly explain a recommendation in *Bratskiy Vestnik* (taking into account political and religious circumstances of that time), that “in a home of a Christian everything should contribute to spiritual joy and glory to the Lord. There should be no more than two or three Scriptures in austere frames, bookshelves with good books, and some reproductions of paintings on religious topic or landscapes, etc.”⁶⁵⁹

The post-Soviet period, however, has witnessed changes in terms of the use of biblical texts. First of all, aesthetic considerations and relevancy play an increasingly significant role. Scripture texts in the worship hall are expected to represent a certain artistic value, be in harmony with the surroundings, and also to be perceived as “beautiful.” Similar changes can be noticed in houses of young Christians where one finds fewer Scripture texts, and those which do exist are exhibited mainly because of their artistic value and design. Secondly, the number of texts has decreased in the houses of prayer, or in some cases there are no decorative texts left at all.⁶⁶⁰ They are beginning to be replaced by symbols, such as beautifully illuminated crosses,⁶⁶¹ banners and tables,⁶⁶² menorahs,⁶⁶³ or open Bibles. Symbols as such gain importance among young people in general. Modern tendencies could be probably viewed as a part of shift towards

⁶⁵⁴ Exod. 23:16. (Personal notes, p. 88b.)

⁶⁵⁵ 1 Sam. 7:12. Church “Hope” in Grodno; church “Ark” in Volovysk, Grodno region (Appendix 2.2.15a and 2.2.38a).

⁶⁵⁶ Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundobaptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae*, p. 9.

⁶⁵⁷ John 4:24. (Personal experience of author’s family and other Baptists in Belarus.)

⁶⁵⁸ Cf. *Evangel’skie khristiane v Rossii i Sovetskom Soyuze*, p. 423.

⁶⁵⁹ A.R., “Khristianin v bytu” [A Christian in Everyday Life], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 5 (1977): 65-67, p. 65.

⁶⁶⁰ “Bethlehem” and “Light of Truth” churches, Minsk.

⁶⁶¹ Churches in Slutsk, Stolbtsy, and Zhodino, Minsk region (Appendix 2.2.6.1, 2.2.34, and 2.2.40); churches in Novopolotsk and Ushachi, Vitebsk region (Appendix 2.2.27 and 2.2.37).

⁶⁶² Churches “Hope” in Grodno and “Emmanuel” in Mogilev (Appendix 2.2.15a and 2.2.25).

⁶⁶³ “Grace of God,” Bobruisk, Mogilev region. (Personal notes, p. 88b.)

a new paradigm, where symbol is regaining importance.⁶⁶⁴



Fig.10. Photograph of textual decoration in Malech house of prayer, Brest region. Texts from left to right: “We preach Christ crucified, resurrected and coming again.” “And behold, I come quickly” (Rev. 3:11a). “The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark. 1:15).

⁶⁶⁴ Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), p. 34. Walter Ong, in his analysis of the main stages in history of the word and evaluating the decreased role of the text, speaks about “secondary orality,” repalcing the oral-aural period. See his *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 85.



Fig.11. Photograph of textual decoration in Sadovyi house of prayer, Brest region.
 Texts from left to right: “Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength” (Psalm 29:1b). “The earth is satisfied with the fruit of His works” (Psalm 104:13b). “The LORD is my light and my salvation” (Psalm 27:1a).



Fig.12. Photograph of textual decoration in Pruzhany house of prayer, Brest region.
 Texts from left to right: “We preach Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23a). God is love. “For it is time to seek the LORD” (Hosea 10:12b).



Fig.13. Photograph of textual decoration in Zavelev's house of prayer, Brest region. Texts on the left, in the center (top to bottom) and on the right: "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits" (Psalm 103:2). "We preach Christ crucified." "In everything give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:18). "You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you" (Deut. 8:2a). "Because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world" (Acts 17:31a).

Turning to the interior architecture, we can talk about five liturgical spaces: *a gathering space* in a vestibule, the rear part of the hall itself or even a courtyard; *a congregational or seating space* which may include a balcony; *a space for movement* (this serves for collecting offerings, distributing the elements of the Lord's Supper and for special acts such as wedding ceremonies); *a space for the choir and musicians*; and *a space for ministers and preachers*.⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁶⁵ Cf. terminology in James F. White and Susan J. White, *Church Architecture. Building and Renovating for Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), p. 18, and Paul H. Jones, "We Are How We Worship: Corporate Worship as a Matrix for Christian Identity Formation," *Worship*, 69 no. 4 (July, 1995): 359.

Remarkably, baptisteries are extremely rare in traditional Baptist houses of prayer. The exceptions in this regard are churches in Voolka, Brest, central Baptist church in Kobrin, Brest region; Machulishchi, Minsk region; "Bethlehem," "Light of Truth," and "Light of Gospel," Minsk (Appendix 2.2.5.3), and a few more. (Personal notes, p. 2.) There is a clear preference of baptizing in rivers or lakes (Appendix 2.4.1), the roots of which are historical. In the days of persecution, it was necessary to conceal the time and place of baptism, especially the baptism of young people, so such services often took place in hard-to-find open water locations. For example, see Sawatsky, *Evangelicheskoye dvizheniye v SSSR posle Vtoroy mirovoy voyny*, pp. 375-376. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the churches could baptize openly, and they did it with evangelistic purposes in mind. It is interesting that up until 2017, "Light of Gospel" church in Minsk, which has a baptistery, conducted baptisms not in the house of prayer but in a river flowing a hundred meters away from the building. Baptisms in the house of prayer were an exception, happening in circumstances such as someone's poor health or disability which made it impossible to

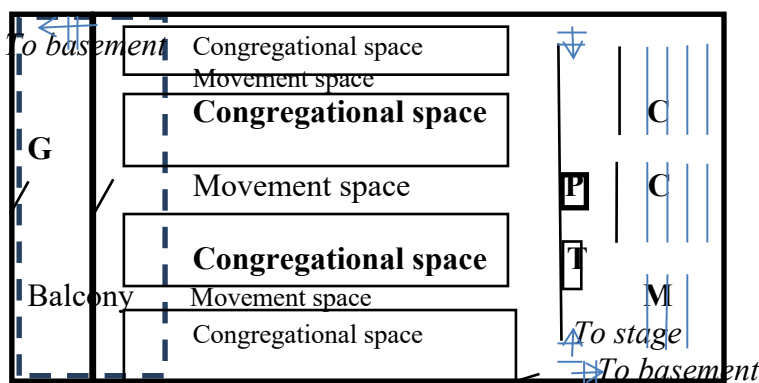


Fig.14. Plan of Baptist church hall, Mopra, Pinsk, as representing a classical type of a house of prayer.⁶⁶⁶ The chart presents a classical type of the house of prayer building. Key: G - gathering space, P - pulpit, T - table, M - ministers space, C - choir space.

The main activities during the meeting take place around the aforementioned liturgical spaces for the choir, musicians, ministers and preachers on an elevated “stage.” Many churches avoid this term, in as far as they are apprehensive of the connotations of secular culture, and prefer more neutral words, such as “elevation” or “elevated platform.” The lack of terminology for describing architectural features of the church building from a liturgical point of view is suggestive of the lack of attention to the theology of space. The choir occupies the largest area on the elevated platform and its prominent location emphasizes the importance of the “rite of singing.”⁶⁶⁷ The pulpit provides the liturgical focus and is usually located in the center⁶⁶⁸ or to

perform the baptism in open water. Since 2017, because of the difficulties in obtaining permissions for open-air baptisms, the church has moved its baptismal acts to the baptistery. The lack of finances and pragmatic concerns has also influenced the churches’ decisions to forego the installation of baptisteries; in small churches, for example, the baptism of one or two believers once a year does not justify the expense of having a baptistery. However, “Bethlehem” and “Light of Truth” churches in Minsk (Appendix 2.4.2) actively use their baptisteries which allows them to incorporate baptism in regular worship. Baptism in baptisteries is becoming popular among young churches in Minsk, and they occasionally rent baptisteries from other churches. Furthermore, since the baptism in the house of prayer is more convenient and does not require permission from the local authorities, the need for a baptistery is likely to become increasingly important. It is notable that in 2014 “Golgotha” church in Minsk rented the baptistery in “Light of Gospel” for the first time in twenty years because of lack of time to obtain permission to hold open water baptism as a result of the new governmental regulations. In 2015 and 2016 “Golgotha” rented the baptistery in “Bethlehem” church in Minsk. (Pavel Osenenko, personal interview with the author, Minsk, 7 March 2017 [Personal notes, p. 32].)

Like the baptistery, a table for the breaking of bread does not play a particularly important role, and may even be completely absent during regular worship meetings. At the same time, the rise in the notion of the sacrality of the house of prayer as a building and aesthetic pursuit have resulted in specially decorated communion tables which are architecturally harmonious with the pulpit. This can be seen in “Light of Gospel,” Minsk; Pershai and Zhodino, Minsk region (Appendix 2.2.5.1, 2.2.29a, and 2.2.40).

⁶⁶⁶ On sanctuary’s structure see T. Jerome Overbeck, “The Worship Environment,” in, ed., *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber, vol. 4, book 2 (Nashville: Star Song Publishing Group, 1994), 578. A new trend is to have a creche in one of the corners of the hall, at a distance from the pulpit. The creche is isolated from the hall, but its big windows and audio system allow the parents with little children hear and see what is going on in worship. This is the case in Central Baptist church in Kobrin, Brest region; “Christmas” and church on Fortechnaya 61/1, Brest.

⁶⁶⁷ Karev, “Sviashchennodeistviya tserkvi,” p. 38. (See Appendix 2.2.1.2; 2.2.2.2; 2.2.5.1; 2.2.24a; and 2.2.30).

⁶⁶⁸ “Golgotha,” Minsk (Appendix 2.2.4.2; Figure 16), Lesovnia and Mar’ina Gorka, Minsk region (2.2.19 and 2.2.3.1 and 2), church on Mopra in Pinsk and church in Sadoviy, Brest region (2.2.30 and 2.2.33; Figure 11).

the left (as the congregation looks at the preacher) of the elevated area.⁶⁶⁹ Its prime function has been to provide the necessities for preaching: the platform elevates the preacher so that they may be seen and heard; a ledge to hold their Bible and manuscript; and perhaps a sounding board or microphone to increase their audibility.⁶⁷⁰ The central position, dominance, size and decoration of the pulpit stress the importance of preaching.

In the twenty-first century new designs or alterations reflect a shift from the pulpit to the stage as a whole.⁶⁷¹ Altering the size and position of the pulpit frees the central part of the stage for other components of the worship service, or alternatively it becomes just one of the details on the stage. Very large pulpits between the listeners and the choir on the centroidal axis may hide part of the choir who in turn view the back of the preacher without any visual interaction. In some churches, pulpits have become smaller and more elegant,⁶⁷² while other churches have moved the pulpit from the elevation down to the main floor, and/or replaced it with movable pulpit⁶⁷³ or music stand.⁶⁷⁴

Another significant aspect is the fact that churches are also paying more attention to music ministry. Here the model of edification may be giving way to a more entertainment-based model, with the design of worship halls resembling that of concert halls. The stage, therefore, becomes more spacious and beautiful. Some churches are also switching to a more participatory style, and an easily accessible stage can be used for the participation of children and all members of the church.⁶⁷⁵ A hierarchical interpretation of liturgical space is being replaced by what Tomas Schattauer, Lutheran Professor of Liturgics, calls “non-hierarchical arrangements of space,”⁶⁷⁶ in response to challenges by ministers who want to convey that they are part of the worshipping community and that the Holy Spirit, not they, is in control of the meeting. As a result, the barrier between the hall and the stage is diminishing as ministers and other worship leaders move from

⁶⁶⁹ Churches in Malech, Man’kovich, Brest region (Appendix 2.2.23a, 2.2.24a; Figures 10 and 15); churches in Slutsk and Machulishchi, Minsk region (2.2.26.1 and 2.2.22).

⁶⁷⁰ The pulpit is sometimes also used as a storage space or a small locker that holds the baskets or plates for the offering, plates and chalices for the Lord’s Supper, songbooks, and other Christian literature.

⁶⁷¹ Compare the new and old structures in central Baptist church in Gomel (Appendix 2.2.1.1, 2.2.1.2, and 2.2.1.5; Figures 19 and 20) and in central Baptist church in Kobrin (2.2.2.1, 2.2.2.2, and 2.2.2.4; Figures 21 and 22).

⁶⁷² “Light of Gospel,” Minsk; Voolka, Brest; central Baptist church in Gomel and church in Slutsk, Minsk region. The last three churches used glass to build a new pulpit (Appendix 2.2.5.1; 2.2.12a; 2.2.1.3 and 2.2.1.4; 2.2.6.2 and 2.2.6.5).

⁶⁷³ Central Baptist church and “Bethany” in Kobrin, church in Pruzhany, Brest region (Appendix 2.2.2.2 and 2.2.2.3; 2.2.18a and 2.2.31); church in Novopolotsk, Vitebsk region (Appendix 2.2.27).

⁶⁷⁴ “House of the Gospel,” Vitebsk. (Personal visit of the author to the ministers’ meeting, 1 July 2015 [Personal notes, p. 2].) In the church in Mar’ina Gorka some preachers do not come up to the pulpit, but simply stand in front of the stage, turn to the congregation with the Bible in their hand (Personal visit of the author to the church service, 2 October 2011 [Personal notes, p. 9].)

⁶⁷⁵ See, e.g., the newly rebuilt “friendly” arrangement in Slutsk and Berezino, Minsk region (Appendix 2.2.2.7a, 2.2.2.7b, and 2.2.6.1)

⁶⁷⁶ Thomas H. Schattauer, “Liturgical Studies: Discipline, Perspectives, Teaching,” *International Journal of Practical Theology*, vol. 11, iss. 1 (August 2007): 129. For examples of “hierarchical” style see Appendix 2.2.4.2; 2.2.11a; 2.2.24a; and 2.2.30.

an elevated area to the first row of seats in the hall; the distinction of “ministers’ space” thereby merges with “congregational space.”⁶⁷⁷

At the same time, however, traditional conceptions about the structure of the worship hall continue to be preserved and remain strong. Those who oppose the types of changes outlined above consider shifts to “theatrical presentation” as a censurable imitation of the world with its performance-culture, as a “deviation from the true Christian spirit” and an unacceptable confusion of “the spiritual and the mundane.”⁶⁷⁸ In their perspective, “the barrier” which divides the worship hall between pastors and congregations is not really a barrier, because any worship participant may come forward and offer a poem, song, testimony, or (in some cases) sermon; the physical division of the space is only a reminder that participation in worship services requires special dedication, solemnity, and responsibility. The fact that the ministers are positioned on an elevation does not contrast them with the congregation, but only provides them with more authority as God’s servants. In addition, the elevated position allows the ministers to observe the congregation, and an experienced pastor is thereby able to notice those who are constantly late, those who spend time in the hallway, and especially those whose seats are vacant. Therefore, the desire to preserve the status quo remains strong enough to preclude widespread, rapid changes in the configuration of the liturgical space.

⁶⁷⁷ Churches “Light of Gospel” and “Bethlehem” in Minsk; church in Slutsk, Minsk region; church “Hope” in Grodno and church “Ark” in Volkovysk, Grodno region. (Personal notes, p. 2.)

⁶⁷⁸ Golodetsky, “Kakim byt’ domu molitvy?” p. 263.



Fig.15. Photograph of worship hall Man'kovichi church/house of prayer, Brest region.



Fig.16. Photograph of worship hall "Golgotha" church, Minsk.



Fig.17. Photograph of worship space Liuban' house of prayer/church, Minsk region.

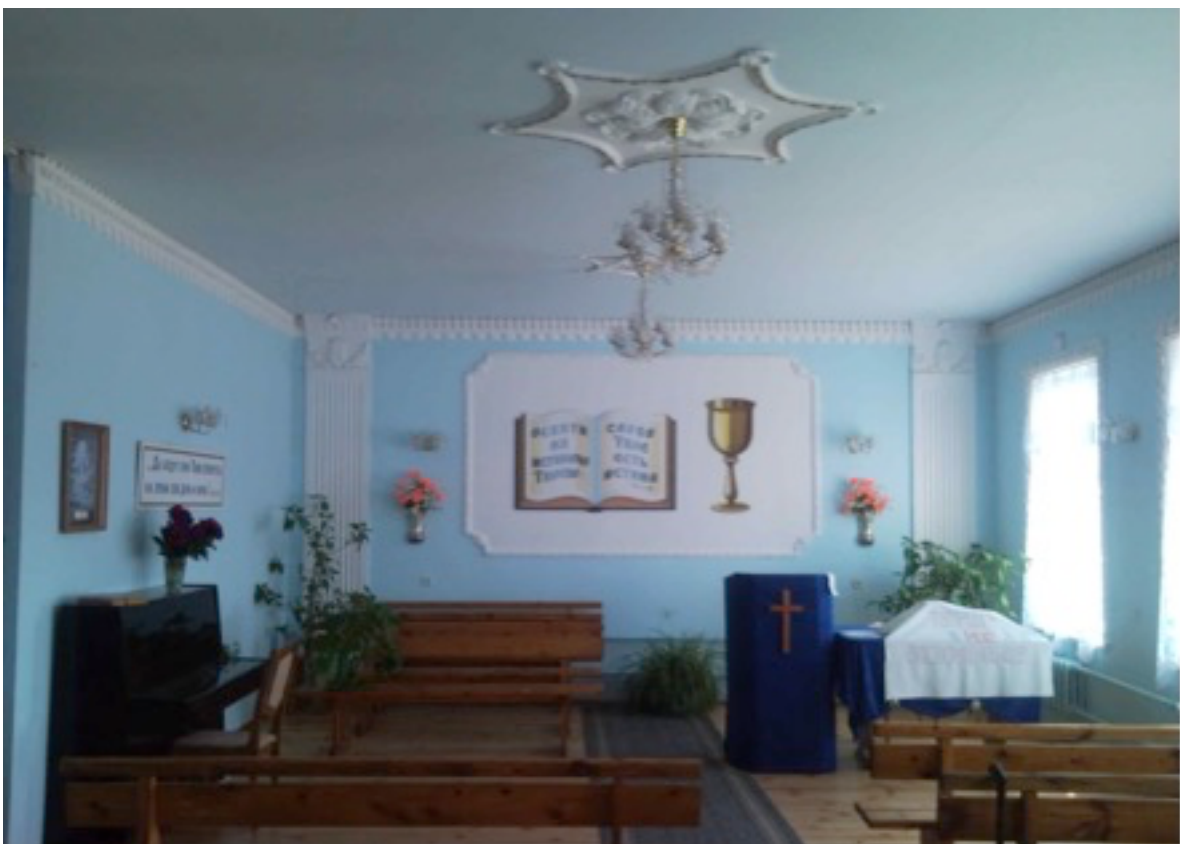


Fig.18. Photograph of worship hall Shatsk house of prayer/church, Minsk region.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, circumstances changed dramatically, confronting evangelical believers with new questions. If Christians before the 1990s were concerned with the mere opportunity to have a house of prayer, now their concern is to establish what should ‘the house of prayer’ or ‘the temple’ look like? If earlier they were concerned with the mere fact of the worship service as an opportunity to get together for singing, prayer and Bible study, now greater importance is applied to the environment of that meeting, to the architecture, design and ornamentation of the house of prayer. If Christians were earlier interested in the opportunity to take a seat in a house of prayer, now the focus is also on the quality and comfort of the benches or the look of the stage.

Some churches strive to give an impetus to public worship by making use of new technological and multimedia tools.⁶⁷⁹ Congregations including the central Baptist church in Kobrin, Brest region, the church in Voolka, Brest, and “Light of Gospel” in Minsk have installed projectors or LCD monitors to project lyrics and Scriptures.⁶⁸⁰ It is the argument of this thesis that a lack of a theology of worship more generally impacts all other areas of the worship service, including the criteria by which changes and alterations in form and in the worship space itself are assessed. Suggestions for change and decisions relating to the actual alterations undertaken do not usually involve serious theological discussion and tend to be primarily guided by questions of aesthetics, comfort and financial resources.

At this juncture, the work of Baptist theologian James McClendon in his book *Doctrine*, offers a helpful framework by which to begin to make a more theological appraisal of what the current situation with regard to worship spaces might tell us about worship thinking. McClendon undertakes a study to discover what the biblical requirements might be for defining a worshipping community, particularly a baptistic community, and how these can be reflected within the gathering of believers for worship. He summarises his understanding into a number of principles that could be applied to any place in which Christians gather to worship—whether a dining room or crumbling basilica, a “temple” or small meeting house. McClendon stresses the principle of accessibility for all who may wish to come, to make it comfortable for the strangers and the lame; there are no unwelcome visitors. Then, in order to maintain fellowship with one another and with God, he notes the importance of visibility and audibility, we must be able to both see and hear one another and hear prophetic preaching. Next is the notion of modesty, as “church space is servant’s quarters, not a princely palace.” Balance is important here; we welcome quality but not luxury. Finally, it should be a place where the Christians experience

⁶⁷⁹ SI, 2012.

⁶⁸⁰ Personal visits of the author to the services of the church 25 October 2015, 9 October 2016, and 2 July 2017, respectively (Personal notes, p. 2b.)

God's presence— what McClendon calls “numinous space.”⁶⁸¹ Something that could in fact happen even in the open field, not just in a building.

Evaluating the present state of houses of prayer in Belarus against McClendon's criteria highlights several areas in need of more careful consideration and interrogation. Theological uncertainty around the status of the house of prayer, and practical factors such as lack of experience and resources, may play a key part in any lack, but the issues revealed by such an assessment are useful lessons and focus attention on the nature of the challenges faced. In regard to the principle of accessibility, quite often steps, a complicated system of stairs, and a steep ascent interfere with the access to the house of prayer for the elderly and especially for the disabled who are not able to overcome those obstacles without some external aid. This is true for old, reconstructed, and new buildings. No Baptist house of prayer in Belarus has an elevator, and the cost of equipment tends to preclude any installation. In addition, the negative attitude of the authorities to the Evangelicals has often resulted in many houses of prayer being built on the periphery, thus making it more difficult to reach them without personal transport.

In spite of a commonly repeated verse that “faith *comes* from hearing,”⁶⁸² acoustics in worship halls often suggest a different kind of ordering of priorities, with audibility not necessarily high on the list. The lack of special training in the field of acoustics for architects and building-engineers, coupled with the lack of resources, can lead to the worship hall being shaped and decorated in ways which do not allow for the natural flow of sound. Even small sanctuaries may be in need of some microphones, amplifiers, and speakers in order to facilitate communication. Nevertheless, technical means cannot always compensate for the faults of construction; inefficient microphone use by some musicians and reciters makes the problem even worse.⁶⁸³

In regard to the principle of visibility, the issue of the field of vision is usually successfully resolved because the hall is open; it has good lighting and a high ceiling, though in some cases it could produce discomfort for the people on the balcony if the height and size of the balcony are disproportionate to the size of the worship hall or if the view is obstructed by columns.⁶⁸⁴ Although the verbal nature of a service does not set high requirements for visibility, limited visibility can easily hinder the comprehension of speech and does not create the feeling of belonging and community among the people present in the worship hall. The oblong shape of

⁶⁸¹ James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Doctrine, Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 414-415. Cf. Christopher Irvine, “Space,” in *The Study of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. Juliette Day and Benjamin Gordon-Taylor (Collegeville: A Pueblo Book, 2013), pp. 111-112. “In considering the design, reordering and assessment of liturgical space” Irvine pays attention to “(a) visibility, (b) audibility and (c) the acoustic of the building.”

⁶⁸² Rom. 10:17.

⁶⁸³ The lack of good audibility stands at odds with an emphasis on spiritual formation and edification.

⁶⁸⁴ Church “Light of Gospel” in Minsk (Appendix 2.2.5).

the sanctuary (in the majority of the houses of prayer) limits the opportunities for the whole congregation being able to see and interact with each other. The focus of attention is shifted to the “front” and communication between members becomes subservient to edification.⁶⁸⁵

Reflecting McClendon’s principle of modesty, here the simplicity of decorations is indeed the result of theology, but also of financial limitations. Yet in this area there is a need to guard against another extreme, as McClendon reminds us: “Lavish use of costly materials strikes the wrong note, but so does pinchpenny construction . . . tightfisted builders waste more than those who plan (and spend) well.”⁶⁸⁶ Very limited finances and a deficit of good building materials in the 1990s in Belarus, when many houses of prayer were quickly constructed, had a negative effect on quality and soon the buildings were in need of repairs.

However, well-crafted service can compensate for shortcomings and lead to God’s presence. As McClendon points out, Jacob experienced God’s presence “at a lonely wayside shrine, where in his sleep he had dreamed a dream (Gen. 28:11-17),” and that presence can be experienced in exactly the same manner in the ‘simplest chapel in the wood’, or even in a place with no building at all, as in the grandest artistic monument.⁶⁸⁷ Christ is in the midst of His faithful ones when they are gathered together in His name.⁶⁸⁸

At the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, Baptists in Belarus have accumulated significant experience in the construction and reconstruction of houses of prayer, but much of that experience remains unclaimed. The period of intensive construction has ended, church growth and the process of planting new churches has slowed, new buildings are not being filled. It is harder to find the funds from donors in the West and it is almost impossible to get a piece of land and permission for the construction of a house of prayer in Belarusian cities. Churches are now reaping what has been sown over the period of about twenty years, from 1990 to 2010. Some of the faults have been gradually corrected: churches alter the elevated platforms, improve the acoustics, and replace heating systems and windows, but many churches live under the consequences of their earlier choices. If a comprehensive theology of worship is to be developed, then more attention needs to be given to the contribution made by the physical place of worship itself. Further study is needed to explore how our theology is reflected in architecture and internal organisation and what the choices we make with regard to our buildings speaks of the nature of the community that gathers there for worship.

⁶⁸⁵ See section 6.3.

⁶⁸⁶ McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 415.

⁶⁸⁷ McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 415.

⁶⁸⁸ Matt. 18:20.



Fig.19. Photograph of the worship hall Central Baptist church, Gomel (2002).



Fig.20. Photograph of the worship hall/space after renovation Central Baptist church, Gomel (2007).

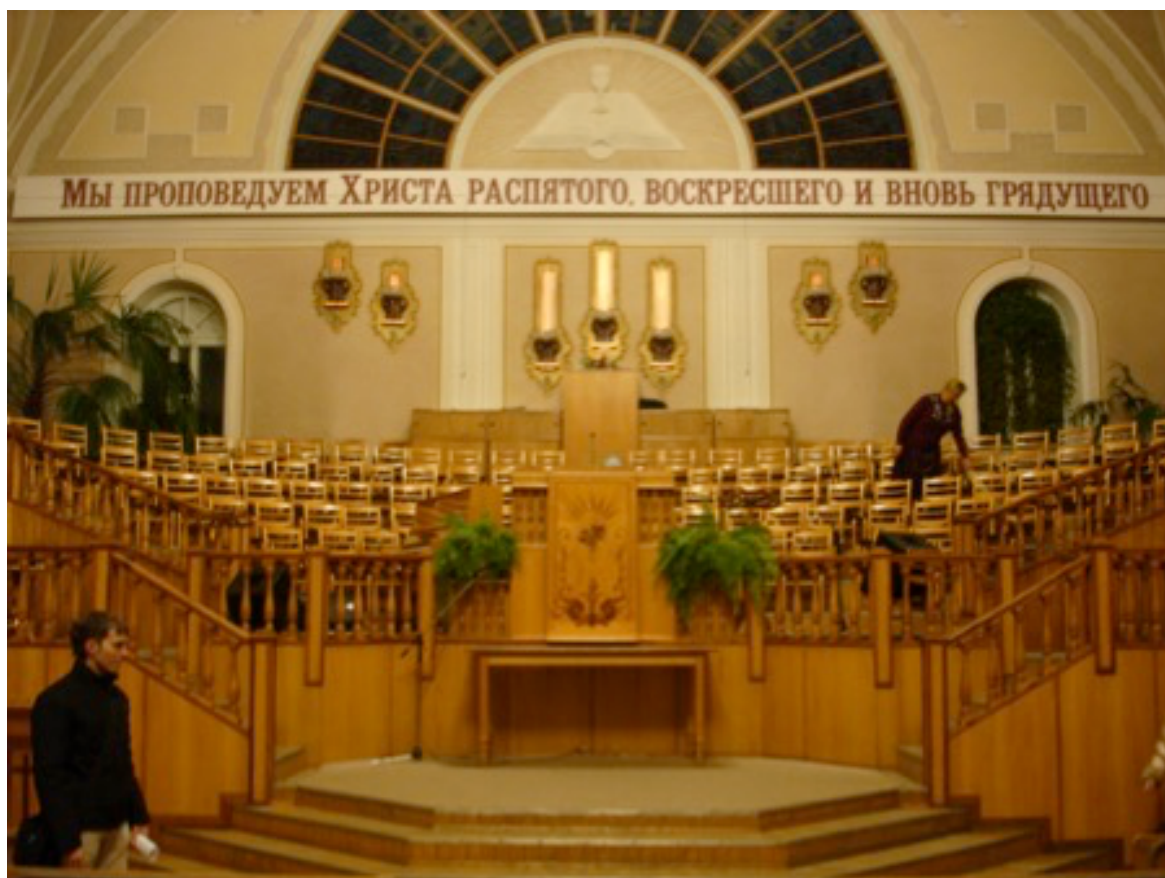


Fig.21. Photograph of elevated platform Central Baptist church, Kobrin (2008).



Fig.22. Photograph of elevated platform after renovation, Central Baptist church, Kobrin (2017).

CHAPTER 6. THEOLOGICAL EMPHASES OF TRADITIONAL PUBLIC WORSHIP

The first part of the thesis sought to explore the historical, political and theological contexts in which traditional forms of Baptist worship have developed in Belarus. This part of the thesis has sought to analyse in detail the form, content and physical space of worship in order to understand the actual practices of the worship itself. Having laid this groundwork, Chapter 6 turns to a more detailed and specific examination of what theological emphases those practices express and the theological understandings they reveal before bringing all the elements together in the final chapter to discuss the tensions inherent in their interaction and how these tensions may in fact hold the key to contextually appropriate, theologically grounded ways forward in developing this expression of Baptist worship in Belarus.

There are some common values which are frequently emphasized in regard to traditional Baptist worship. As will be argued below, these values include simplicity, the central role of the Bible, an emphasis on edification, and evangelism. This list is a product of engagement with other studies on Baptist worship and the analysis of formation, content and form of Russian-speaking worship itself. It is largely these emphases that determine the characteristics of traditional worship in Belarusian Baptist churches.

Christopher Ellis, exploring “The Soul of Baptist Worship,” lists simplicity, attention to Scripture, devotion and openness to the Spirit, fellowship and Kingdom as the key elements or characteristics of Baptist worship.⁶⁸⁹ Thomas McKibbens defines those elements as including “simplicity, dependence on the Holy Spirit, the centrality of preaching, the prevalent anthropocentrism.”⁶⁹⁰ In fact, all these characteristics describe traditional Baptist worship in Belarus to various degrees. However, observation, experience of participating in worship, interaction with participants and review of the materials by indigenous writers direct the research to the specific areas of the centrality of the Bible, simplicity, edification and evangelism. “Openness to the Spirit” or “dependence on the Holy Spirit” will be studied in the final part of the thesis from the point of view of tension between freedom and form in worship.

The central role of the Bible is the main focus of the worship. The authors of the official history of ECB churches in the USSR stress that it was the Bible which defined the form and content of worship of evangelical Christians. They argued that matching the ‘practice of Christian life against the teaching of the Gospel’ brought people ‘to reject rites and rituals of Orthodoxy’.⁶⁹¹ Karev states that “the Word of God has the most important role in evangelical

⁶⁸⁹ Ellis, *Gathering*, pp. 71-99. See also Ellis, “Duty and Delight: Baptist Worship and Identity,” p. 337.

⁶⁹⁰ McKibbens, “Our Baptist Heritage in Worship,” p. 66.

⁶⁹¹ *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristijan-baptistov v SSSR*, p. 154.

worship.”⁶⁹² This idea is supported by the references to creeds and hymnals in section 6.1.

Edification, the importance of “instruction by the Word of God”⁶⁹³ is related to the Bible. Konstantin Somov highlights this in his article and contrasts it to the Orthodox understanding of worship.⁶⁹⁴ Edification is first of all achieved in worship.⁶⁹⁵ This term was often used by ministers and church members in the research questionnaires, when they were seeking to explain the purpose of worship.⁶⁹⁶

Inclusion of evangelism in the list is justified, as we will see later, by the content of worship, the nature of the worship space (see section 5.4.2. The language of the interior), the texts of hymns, and the results of observations by secular and Orthodox researches. Personal experience and the experience of worship participants also indicate the importance of evangelism.

The last theological focus could be defined as simplicity. From the very beginning of the gospel movement in the Russian Empire its apologists called for the simplicity of worship, and they were critical of the outward magnificence, luxury and splendor of the Orthodox liturgy.⁶⁹⁷ Later in 1966, on the pages of *Bratskiy Vestnik*, Baptist worship was contrasted to a “pompous ritual” of the Orthodox Church.⁶⁹⁸ The official website of the Russian Baptist Union states that “our worship services are distinguished by external simplicity, in such a way that the pomp of the rite and external attributes could not obscure somebody’s fellowship with the Living God.”⁶⁹⁹ The evolution of worship in the future may require changes or additions but the proposed list sufficiently covers the current situation.

6.1. Centrality of Scripture

6.1.1. The importance of the Bible in life, doctrine, and worship

The first theological emphasis of traditional Baptist worship is the centrality of the Bible. Scripture, the Bible, or God’s Word—terms which are used interchangeably—is proclaimed to be the foundation of worship. The authors of the official history of the Baptist churches in the Soviet Union stress that the Bible determined the shape and content of Baptist worship from the very beginning, pointing out that the movement itself “began as a result of comparing Christian practice with the teaching of the Gospel and it led to abandonment of Orthodox rituals and

⁶⁹² A.V. Karev, “Slovo Bozhie” [The Word of God], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 2 (1964): 14.

⁶⁹³ Somov, “O propovedi i propovednikakh,” p. 33.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁵ Karev, “Sviashchennodeistviya tserkvi,” p. 38.

⁶⁹⁶ QM, 2008; Q, 2008.

⁶⁹⁷ Prokhanov, *V kotle Rossii*, p. 20. Liven, *Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie v Rossii*, p. 21.

⁶⁹⁸ Belousov, “Gospod’ sila moya i pesn’,” p. 76.

⁶⁹⁹ <https://baptist.org.ru/read/article/94201>, last accessed 4 November 2019.

statutes.”⁷⁰⁰ Thus “Bible-believing” Christians read the Bible, listened to the sermons and expressed sentimental and tender love for this Book in their songs. A few lines from a popular hymn illustrate this sentiment, combining devotion and a reverent attitude towards the Bible as a book:

Living Word divinely spoken, wonderful and true!
My heart delights in you!
What a gift for every day! You direct me on my way
To my homeland where the Lord will take me soon.⁷⁰¹

Another well-known song speaks of the exceptional value of the Bible in the believer’s spiritual life:

I will never forsake the holy Bible,
For in it I found salvation and eternal joy.
I trust only the Holy Bible, it gives me truth and light,
It is the spring of life and there is nothing like it.
Never will I abandon the Holy Bible,
Never will I abandon this Holy Book.⁷⁰²

The shortage of Bibles suffered by evangelical Christians up to the time of *perestroika* enhanced the value attached to the Bible as a book for those who sang these hymns. As illustrated by a letter from the leadership of AUCECB to Baptist churches in 1957, churches were able to obtain a small number of Bibles, primarily for the preachers. Supplying every church member was out of the question,⁷⁰³ although Christian families may have had a copy of the Bible at home. The situation improved by the mid-1980s, but even then, many Baptist believers would have obtained their personal copy illegally (that is, a copy that would have been smuggled into the country), and it may well have cost a whole month’s salary.⁷⁰⁴

In the wider context, the extraordinary importance of the Bible in public worship has been associated with the crucial role attributed to Scripture in regard to daily Christian life, doctrinal statements, and the personal devotion of Christians. The description of Baptist worship in Estonia by Toivo Pilli, who speaks of a Word-orientated understanding of faith,⁷⁰⁵ can also be applied to the Belarusian context. According to the Statement of Faith of Belarusian Baptists,

⁷⁰⁰ *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, p. 66.

⁷⁰¹ “Kniga Bogom mne dana” [God-Given Book], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 754, refrain.

⁷⁰² “Naveki ne ostavliu Svyatuyu Bibliyu” (I Will Never Forsake the Holy Bible), *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 701, first, forth stanzas, and refrain.

⁷⁰³ *The History of the Evangelical Movement in Eurasia 4.0*, Primary sources, EAAA, 2005.

⁷⁰⁴ This was also my personal experience; my first Bible was obtained illegally and it cost the equivalent of my mother's monthly salary. Usually small-size Bibles were smuggled into the country. For a background story of ‘Bible smugglers’, see Brother Andrew, *God's Smuggler* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008).

⁷⁰⁵ Pilli, “Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Estonia: The Shaping of Identity, 1945-1991,” p. 164. Also see Pilli, “Baptists in Estonia 1884-1940,” *The Baptist Quarterly*, vol. XXXIX, no. 1 (Jan. 2001): 27-28.

“Holy Scripture is the source of Christian faith and spiritual guide for believers,”⁷⁰⁶ though this statement is not as categorical as the 1928 Confession which proclaimed that the Bible was “the only source of knowledge about God as well as the only rule and measure of our faith and conduct.”⁷⁰⁷

The Bible functions as the key tool for personal worship, which is basically defined as Scripture reading and prayer. As one Western researcher observed in the 1960s, “it was the specific contribution of the ‘sectarians’ to the religious life of Russia that they helped to fill the gap of [the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures].”⁷⁰⁸ A Soviet author noted, “Many Orthodox Christians have no Bibles and have a vague idea of what it is about. In contrast, the sectarians view the Bible as their handbook. It is recommended that they spend all of their free time reading ‘Holy Scripture’.”⁷⁰⁹

The contrast drawn between the Baptists and the Orthodox believers is helpful in understanding the essential role of the Bible. The first evangelical believers in the Russian Empire pointed to a disastrously poor knowledge of the Bible and indifference to God’s Word among the Orthodox parishioners, stressing that “all worship was reduced to mere rituals and ceremonies and it rested upon people’s ignorance, their age-long desire to worship tangible objects, saints and relics.”⁷¹⁰ In 1876-1877, such a lack of biblical literacy was acknowledged by the famous Russian writer and Orthodox apologist Nickolai Leskov, although in a much more sympathetic tone: “Russian people have a good and warm faith, although most of them are not versed in Scripture...”⁷¹¹

Vladimir Martsinkovskiy, Christian thinker, lecturer, and one of the leaders of the Russian movement of Christian students, describes a typical episode when, after the 1917 Revolution, he was on a train with Red Guard soldiers. One of the soldiers was boasting of his “exploits,” robberies and murders in which he was involved during the revolution. The author writes: “I couldn’t stand it anymore, so I rose from my place and asked the man, “Did Jesus teach you to do this in the Gospels?” to which he replied, “Do you think we read it? We only

⁷⁰⁶ *Zayavleniye very evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v Belarusi, Mart 2002* [Statement of Faith of Evangelical-Christians-Baptists, March 2002], Unpublished, 1.5.

⁷⁰⁷ N.V. Odintsov, ed. *Ispovedanie very khristian-baptistov, 1928* [Christian Baptist Confession, 1928], <https://slavicbaptists.com/2012/02/10/verouchenie1928/>, last accessed 16 May 2019.

⁷⁰⁸ Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union* (London: MacMillan, 1961), p. 298.

⁷⁰⁹ Ryabushkin, *Kto takie sektanty*, p. 13.

⁷¹⁰ Yulia Kruedener and Anna Lion, *Evangelist. Zhizn' i sluzhenie Ivana Onishchenko* [An Evangelist: The Life and Ministry of Ivan Onishchenko], part 1, ch. 25, <http://www.blagovestnik.org/books/00092.htm>, last accessed 16 May 2019.

⁷¹¹ Leskov, “Velikosvetsky raskol,” p. 81. In his analysis of the situation in the eastern European context, Parush Parushev, aptly notes, “Due to the mystical, apophatic and liturgical nature of Orthodox worship, the message of salvation is well hidden behind the elaborate rituals and non-verbal ways of communication of the Orthodox Christian worship, and the meaning of the message is almost irreversibly lost for generations born in Eastern Europe after WWII.” See Parush R. Parushev, “Walking in the Dawn of the Light: on the Salvation Ethics of the Ecclesial Communities in the Orthodox Tradition from a Radical Reformation Perspective” (PhD diss., the School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2006), p. 23.

kissed the cover of the Book... But we have no idea what's written in it.”⁷¹² Similarly, Ivan Prokhanov complained that “people’s religious ignorance takes grotesque forms. If you ask somebody, ‘Who is more important, Saint Nicholas or Jesus Christ?’ most frequently you’ll hear the answer, ‘Of course, Saint Nicholas’.”⁷¹³

However, defining themselves over against the Orthodox was not the only factor which contributed to the centrality of Scripture in the public worship of the Baptist churches. Baptists also saw themselves as a part of the Reformation tradition with its emphasis on the Word,⁷¹⁴ and more specifically, the heirs to the radical Reformation, in which there were no “fathers,” no “tradition,” and no authorities or sources of faith other than the Bible. As Steven Sheeley put it, “Baptists, that unmanageable subset of Protestant Christians, have styled themselves as ‘people of the Book.’”⁷¹⁵ The Orthodox priests also noted that Baptist preachers paid special attention to the knowledge of the Bible. A. Vvedenskiy reflected that Baptist preaching was so successful because of the efforts and care invested in literacy, reading the Gospel and religious conversations.⁷¹⁶ From the Baptist point of view, their desire to follow “the first Christian Church of the Apostolic period”⁷¹⁷ encouraged them to gather “around the Word of God passed on by the Apostles and later their successors.”⁷¹⁸

The value of the Bible in public worship is expressed in the significance attached to the Ministry of the Word in an assembly of believers. In fact, the major elements of this type of worship are not the Word and the sacraments, as in classical Protestantism, but the Word (understood to be both Scripture as well as the sermon(s) on that Scripture), prayer, and singing. These are the staple elements of weekly worship,⁷¹⁹ with the Word considered to be of primary importance.⁷²⁰ Thus, preaching takes most of the time in public worship; the latter is in fact “a service of the Word set in the context of prayer and praise.”⁷²¹ Nikolai Alexandrenko, an author of a book on homiletics for Russian-speaking readers, states, “preaching is basically worship.”⁷²² Alexander Karev likewise writes that “preaching is the central sacred rite of the New Testament Church.”⁷²³ The structure of the hall, or more specifically the place of the pulpit, also reflects the

⁷¹² Martsinkovskiy, *Zapiski veruyushchego*, p. 48.

⁷¹³ Prokhanov, *V kotle Rossii*, p. 21.

⁷¹⁴ Paul E. Engle, series ed. and Paul A. Basden, gen. ed., *Exploring the Worship Spectrum* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p. 176.

⁷¹⁵ Steven M. Sheeley, “Baptists and the Bible Translation: Toward a Deeper Understanding,” *Baptist History and Heritage*, no. 2, vol. XLII (Spring 2007): 8.

⁷¹⁶ Vvedenskiy, “P’yanstvo i sektantstvo,” p. 698.

⁷¹⁷ Somov, “O propovedi i propovednikakh,” p. 33.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid.

⁷¹⁹ Cf. Ilion T. Jones, *A Historical Approach to Evangelical Worship* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon Press, MCMLIV), p. 83.

⁷²⁰ Q, 2008; QM, 2008.

⁷²¹ McKibbens, “Our Baptist Heritage in Worship,” p. 61.

⁷²² N.A. Alexandrenko, *Homiletica* [Homiletics] (Odessa: Bogomyslie, 1997), p. 26.

⁷²³ Karev, “Sviashchennodeistviya tserkvi,” p. 36. In a few churches a text on the pulpit surface facing the

idea of the centrality of the Word.⁷²⁴

The written Word is to direct listeners towards the Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ, and it is through faith in Him that people can be saved. God's Word is therefore called the first instrument of grace God uses to draw sinners to Himself because it enables men and women to awaken from their deep sinful sleep, acknowledge their sins and guilt, and show true repentance for these sins.⁷²⁵ Or, following the lines of a song,

Oh Holy Bible! It alone
Has the power to correct people' life.
There we see
How our Savior suffered for us.
Oh Holy Bible! It alone
Brings a message of life
In the Father's love and Jesus' blood
That He shed on the cross.⁷²⁶

6.1.2. *Back to the Bible*

The analysis of worship in traditional Baptist churches provides sufficient ground for the centrality of Scripture, but it also reveals a tension between the proclaimed role and the actual role of the Bible. The claim to Bible-centeredness is not always supported by the actual content of worship. Indeed, this is not unique to Russian-speaking Baptists, but may signal a wider problem amongst those claiming Baptist heritage. As preachers do not follow any kind of lectionary and have freedom in choosing the topic and passage for the sermon, this results in “a sad lack of Scripture reading in many Baptist churches.”⁷²⁷ Contemporary North American Baptist theologian Steven Harmon comments, “Although Baptists have sometimes called themselves “people of the Book,” many Baptist congregations hear very little Scripture in the

preacher says, “The place where you are standing is holy” (Josh. 5:15) in order to fill the preacher with awe and a feeling of responsibility. (Church on Fortechnaya 61/1, Brest; Church in Svyatopolka, Brest region, Personal visits of the author to the church services 11 December 2011 and 12 February 2012, respectively [Personal notes, p. 11].)

⁷²⁴ A number of churches would traditionally keep a big Bible on the pulpit, which created an inconvenience for preachers who usually preferred to use their own Bible. Examples of such churches would be the following: in Pinsk (on Mopra) and Yatskovichi, Brest region; church “Ark” in Volkovysk, Grodno region; church in Mozyr', Gomel region; churches in Soligorsk (Appendix 2.2.36) and Slutsk, Minsk region; “Grace of God,” Bobruisk, Mogilev region. In Volozhin, Minsk region, a new house of prayer was built in 2010 and a large-size Bible was placed on the pulpit. In some churches, like in Mikashevichi, Brest region, the Bible was removed or moved to the shelf inside the pulpit, or moved to Communion tables, such as in Ushachi church, Vitebsk region and Liuban', Minsk region. In the Central Baptist church in Kobrin, Brest region, until 2010 there was an old pre-revolutionary copy of the Bible for people to see on the pulpit. Later on, it was only displayed once a year during the Day of Harvest, when it was put on an elevation next to the fruit of the earth with gratitude to the Lord for the physical and spiritual bread. Some churches keep the Bibles on the pastor's table, as in Central Baptist church in Gomel' and the church in Novopolotsk, Vitebsk region. This information was gathered from Q, 2013. With regard to this, Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener make an insightful remark: “An always open Bible on the pulpit is a fallacious symbol, especially if it is an antique exemplar that is not in use – as is the case in many churches. The centre of worship is not an exhibition space, the Bible is not museum piece.” (*Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, p. 96.)

⁷²⁵ Cf. Odintsov, *Ispovedanie very khristian-baptistov*, chs. 6 and 7.

⁷²⁶ “Svyataya Bibliya” [Oh Holy Bible], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 824, first and second stanzas.

⁷²⁷ McKibbens, “Our Baptist Heritage in Worship,” p. 67.

context of worship.”⁷²⁸ A similar picture emerges in traditional Baptist services in Belarus.⁷²⁹ As text choice is conditioned by preacher preferences, some biblical books or texts can be forgotten entirely, with preachers preaching a significantly reduced Scriptural canon instead of “the whole purpose of God.”⁷³⁰

The above is an indication of a shift from reading Scripture to explaining Scripture, or from Bible-centrism to sermon-centrism.⁷³¹ Anatoly Rudenko, director of the Russian Bible Society, speaks of “the cult of the sermon,” where “the preacher is the only one who addresses the audience, and the Word of God, the Bible, is only a source of quotations which the preacher uses to support his ideas and exhortations.”⁷³² This may not be universally true; some preachers may engage with long Bible passages and stay with the text, but the tendency is obvious.

In the past, faced with an almost complete lack of reference literature and no access to theological education, many preachers simply retold Bible passages, and even today one can still hear this from elderly preachers in small churches. This approach could also be supported by an understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture. An outline of this type of sermon, recorded during worship in a Baptist church in Molodechno, Minsk region, is presented below. The text for this sermon was Psalm 67.

“May God ... make His face shine upon us ...” We also ask about it. What happens when the Lord makes His face shine upon us? What will we see in our heart?

“May the peoples praise You.” Who do people praise today? They praise many people, rulers, celebrities. But we should praise God ... Brothers and sisters, let us praise God.

“And all the ends of the earth will fear Him.” Right now people fear no one. More than that, they are proud of their achievements and exalt themselves. But a time will come when they will fear the Lord Most High. In contrast, believers fear the Lord, praise Him and serve Him. May the Lord help us praise Him and do His

⁷²⁸ Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2006), p. 161.

⁷²⁹ To take the example of three worship services in “Light of Gospel” church in Minsk, their nine sermons (the duration of each being fifteen to twenty minutes) included the following texts: (1) Acts 2:42-47; Matt. 12:15-21; Eph. 2:11-12; (2) Phil 4:4-7; John 1:40-42; Jer. 24; 29:7; (3) Eph. 3:14-21; Rom. 8:2-6; 2:13; Eph. 2:11-12. Although the preachers read other short texts to support some of their ideas—usually one or two verses—given that the total duration of the sermons would be over six hours, this does not stand out as a great amount of Scripture. (Personal visits of the author to the church services, 1 July 2007, 8 July 2007, and 13 January 2008 [Personal notes, p. 10b].) Similarly, two visits separated by several years to the “Golgotha” church, Minsk, provide the following illustrative statistics. At an evening service, the first preacher read two verses (length of sermon, seventeen minutes), the second read seven and referred to two other verses (twenty-three minutes), the third preacher read twenty-two and referred to two verses (sixteen minutes). (“Golgotha” church, Minsk, 19 February 2011, Personal visit of the author to the church service 19 February 2011 [Personal notes, p. 10b].)

On another occasion at the morning service, the first preacher read Psalm 119:174; 1 Thess. 5:1-10 and Matt. 24:42-44 (length of sermon, thirteen minutes), the second preacher, 3 John 1-6a (length of sermon, sixteen minutes), and the third read James 2:14-26; Rom. 3:24-26; 5:1-2; 8:1-2; 2 Cor. 13:5; Jer. 7:8-11; Matt. 7:2; Prov. 20:6 (length of sermon, twenty five minutes). (“Golgotha” church, Minsk, Personal visit of the author to the church service 13 January 2008 [Personal notes, p. 10b].)

⁷³⁰ Acts 20:27.

⁷³¹ It may be pointed out that while the law of God was read out loud clearly and then “interpretation was added” (Neh. 8:8, literal translation from Russian Synodal Bible) during that period of worship in Jerusalem, nowadays many preachers first interpret and then add the text to their interpretation.

⁷³² Anatoliy Rudenko, *Kul't propovedi i sluzheniye slova* [The cult of the sermon and the ministry of the word]. <http://gazeta.mirt.ru/?2-37-1364>, last accessed 14 August 2014.

will today, too.⁷³³

Cheprasov believes that this form of recounting the text with “unsophisticated interpretation played a formative role in establishing and spreading of the Russian Baptist movement.”⁷³⁴ This method at least allowed the Bible to speak for itself, to some extent replacing reading the text in worship, and it also increased overall biblical literacy in the days when the Bible was rare. Worship in general had a formative role, since preaching was not as important as the possibility of gathering and spending time together.

The method of recounting the text with attendant unsophisticated interpretation appears, with the advent and use of theological literature, to be too naive and simplistic in reinvigorating the centrality of the Bible. The goal might better be achieved by reviving the ancient practice of Scripture reading, Bible-focused preaching and the practice of bringing the Bible into other components of worship. Indeed, some churches do read the Bible before or during their regular worship as a separate element that is not directly related to the sermon.⁷³⁵ In “Golgotha” Church Minsk, passages of the passion of Christ are read before the first Sunday of the month, as worship participants prepare for Communion. Of special note is the practice of the “Light of Gospel” Church in Minsk. Here the story of Christ’s sufferings and death is usually read once a year on Easter Saturday. The reading involves twelve to fifteen readers, each of whom reads between five and twelve verses, while the choir sings the same theme between the readings.⁷³⁶

Responsive reading could also prove helpful in encouraging interaction with Biblical texts. It allows people present in worship to listen and read the Bible, thus enabling their better memorization of the texts. A recently revised hymnal for Baptist churches based on the *Song of Revival* includes texts from the Scripture which participants may read responsively in their

⁷³³ Personal visits of the author to the church service 9 November 2008 (Personal notes, p. 10b).

⁷³⁴ Cheprasov, “Formative? Informative? Neither? Towards understanding of the practice of proclamation, the core element of Russian Baptist Worship,” p. 14.

⁷³⁵ “Hope” church in Grodno reads a chapter from Scripture during each service. In 2013, the Baptist church in Slutsk, Minsk region began to read one chapter from the Bible at the beginning of the service. “Gospel of Light” church in Minsk began to read one chapter from the Bible at the beginning of the worship in 2016. (Personal visits of the author to the church services 26 November 2017, 26 March 2017, and 7 August 2016 respectively) [Personal notes, p. 11].)

In some churches the Bible is read before the start of the service, as in Ushachi, Vitebsk region and Zaslavl’, Minsk region till 2010. (Personal visit of the author to the church services 4 November 2014, 26 April 2009 and 1 January 2012 [Personal notes, p. 10].)

⁷³⁶ Bible reading can take various forms in public worship. It may consist of one chapter from the Gospels (in the morning) and the Epistles (in the evening) followed by a brief explanation if necessary. Von Allmen, following modern Reformed lectionaries, suggests the three major types of witness in the Bible – the prophet, the apostle and the Lord – to be read every Sunday. *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, p. 135. In addition, before prayer (call to worship) or singing, passages from Scripture on the topic of worship can be read, mostly from the Book of Psalms. In conclusion, the meeting could close with biblical benedictions from the Book of Psalms or the Epistles. In fact, 2 Cor. 13:14 (“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all”) is regularly heard in concluding prayers in traditional worship.

worship.⁷³⁷ However, such practice is not currently a general part of worship apart from some rare exceptions.⁷³⁸ There are other options for reading (some of them tested by the author in the same church in Borovliany), which might include role-play reading of a book or part of a book of the Bible.⁷³⁹

Churches need also to revive Bible-focused preaching. Partially, this can be realized in expository preaching practice. In fact, systematic study of the Bible in preaching and, accordingly, consistent reading of the Bible in the church has just now begun to gain momentum in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Some churches study specific books of the Bible, such as Romans, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and James; in other churches preachers preach on popular Bible passages like the Sermon on the Mount, the Decalogue,⁷⁴⁰ and so on.⁷⁴¹ However, established habits and ministry experience in the Soviet era discourage or prevent some pastors from using the benefits of in-depth Bible study in the context of a sermon. The emphasis on the Scriptures for some preachers does not mean serious exegesis, and preparation for preaching is only regarded, according to Cheprasov, as a “spiritual exercise for preachers’ hearts and minds, which involves prayer and a good knowledge of the Bible.”⁷⁴² It is true that a preacher’s experience and personality may seem more important than his education and Bible knowledge, and in practice, the latter could mean only a general acquaintance with the text of the Bible, the ability to find and quote the necessary verse but is not necessarily understanding of the context, historical and cultural background, the genre diversity of the Scripture and the meaning of words. Thus, the revival of Bible-focused preaching is impossible without transforming the preachers and their attitude towards education, along with returning to the understanding that the

⁷³⁷ *Pesn’ Voskhzhdeniya. Sbornik tserkovnykh gimnov i pesnopenii* [Song of Ascension. Collection of Spiritual Hymns and Songs of Evangelical Churches] (Bryansk: Muzikal’no-khorovoi otdel Bezhitskoi tserkvi EKhB, 2009).

⁷³⁸ “House of the Gospel,” Vitebsk (Timofei Egorenkov, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 26 November 2015 [Personal notes, p. 10b].) As another example, a church in Borovliany, Minsk region, read Psalm 103 in this manner at the Harvest feast at the beginning of the service on 8 October 2017 (Personal notes, p. 11). Sheets of paper with passages highlighted for reading were distributed before public worship. The church has 28 members, uses temporary premises for worship and it does not use a multimedia projector.

⁷³⁹ *The Dramatised Bible* can provide good ideas for reading the Scriptures (Michael Perry, ed., *The Dramatised Bible* [London: Marshall Pickering/Bible Society, 1989]). There is another way of structuring Bible reading that reveals the unity of the Scriptures. Texts read at Christmas or Easter could be arranged according to the pattern of “prophesy-fulfillment.” Initially people read Old Testament passages and then the corresponding ones from the New Testament.

⁷⁴⁰ Q, 2008.

⁷⁴¹ Preaching “verse by verse” is practiced in “Hope” church, Gomel (Gospel of Mark); “Bethlehem,” Minsk (Acts); “House of the Gospel,” Vitebsk (Galatians); and Krasnosel’sky, Grodno region (Psalms). Q, 2013. The negative side of this approach is the overload of sermons with historical and cultural analysis data.

⁷⁴² Cheprasov, “Formative? Informative? Neither? Towards understanding of the practice of proclamation, the core element of Russian Baptist Worship,” p. 128. In her article Olga Bokova discusses tension between traditional and new principles and methods of Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics in Russian Evangelical Christians-Baptists theology, and this analysis is relevant in the Belarusian context. (Olga Bokova, “Bibleiskaia Ekzegetika i Hermenevtika Sovremennikh Evangeliskikh Khristian – Baptistov: Traditsii i Novatsii” [Biblical Exegesis and Hermeneutics of Contemporary Evangelical Christians-Baptists: Traditions and New Trends], *Vestnik Leningradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta im. A. S. Pushkina* [Messenger of Leningrad State University], Issue 2, Vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 2013): 216-226.)

sermon is a work of the Spirit, the exercise of the preacher's mind, inspiration from above and careful meditation over the text of the Bible. "Ministry of the Word," that is defined only as "the ministry of the Spirit,"⁷⁴³ cannot encompass its full potential.

The centrality of the Bible in worship can be fostered through bringing the Bible into other components of worship so that "Scripture permeates worship."⁷⁴⁴ Yet biblical content of songs, prayers, poetry and preaching often lies at the discretion of the worship leader and may vary significantly. Many hymns used in traditional worship express a subjective perception of Christ's sacrifice and suffering with an emphasis on personal experiences,⁷⁴⁵ while the biblical-theological component is not given enough attention, although it is assumed that hymns are based on the Bible and "each of them uses a particular passage from Scripture."⁷⁴⁶

Worship can be filled with the Bible, yet this should be accompanied by the understanding that reading alone is not enough. The Bible is not a collection of quotes, and the number of texts read and listened to is not a decisive factor. From the very beginning of the evangelical movement, the Christians were interested in practical application and their aspiration shaped Baptist churches.⁷⁴⁷ Biblical narrative, especially the gospel accounts of Christ became part of their life and helped them to survive persecution even when Christians were not able to get together to read the Bible.

Listening to the Bible and reading it is not limited only to worship. The Scripture is a part of "congregational life."⁷⁴⁸ The Bible, according to McClendon, works "as a congregational textbook, source of sermons, classroom handbook, devotional guide, practical norm."⁷⁴⁹ Such a holistic use of the Bible can transform the believer's life.

And lastly, Christians worship the incarnate word, not the written word or the Bible.⁷⁵⁰ All eyes in the church are fixed on him.⁷⁵¹ Such, truly Bible-centered worship, focused on God and revealing His will by the Holy Spirit through the Bible and revealing Himself through Christ who died and rose again, will lead worshippers into fellowship with the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, and with each other.

⁷⁴³ Cheprasov, "Formative? Informative? Neither? Towards understanding of the practice of proclamation, the core element of Russian Baptist Worship," p. 129.

⁷⁴⁴ Duncan B. Forrester, J. Ian H. McDonald, and Gian Tellini, *Encounter with God: An Introduction to Christian Worship and Practice* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp. 64-67.

⁷⁴⁵ On this subject, see McKibbens, "Our Baptist Heritage in Worship," where he discusses a shift from theocentrism to anthropocentrism in worship.

⁷⁴⁶ K.V. Somov, "Pesnya v zhizni khristianina" [A Song in the Life of a Christian], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 4 (1964): 29.

⁷⁴⁷ Cheprasov, "Formative? Informative? Neither? Towards understanding of the practice of proclamation, the core element of Russian Baptist Worship," p. 149.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁹ McClendon, *Doctrines*, p 35.

⁷⁵⁰ Cheprasov, "Formative? Informative? Neither? Towards understanding of the practice of proclamation, the core element of Russian Baptist Worship," pp. 149-150.

⁷⁵¹ Luke 4:20. Cf. Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, p. 96.

6.2. Edification in worship

6.2.1. The role of 'edification' in Baptist worship

The next characteristic which follows the emphasis on the Bible and the Word-oriented nature of public worship is edification (*nazidaniye*)⁷⁵² – that is, the guidance, teaching, and nurturing of the Christian in their faith, wisdom, holiness, or moral instruction received when participants enrich each other with the knowledge and application of Scripture.⁷⁵³ Although encouragement, comfort, evangelism, fellowship, inspiration, and praise are acknowledged goals in worship, ministers and members of congregations practicing traditional Baptist worship consider edification to be the most important, and the term “edification” is often explicitly referred to in discussing the quality of worship.⁷⁵⁴ Singing from the section in the hymnal, “Before the Beginning of Worship,”⁷⁵⁵ believers ask that through the Holy Spirit the Lord would help them understand and apply His Word:

O Savior! Pour out Your grace on the good news;
Let us understand all the words of Your love.
Open up the hearts of all, and plant Your Word in this good soil,
Let the dew of mercy and Your love fall on our hearts!⁷⁵⁶

Then at the conclusion of the worship service the congregation promises in song to keep instruction in their hearts and expresses a desire to continue the process at the next worship service:

We have had a time of learning, now we leave this place -
As we go, we treasure dearly all the words of grace.
We will wait for Sunday morning to come back again,
For another time of learning on this happy day.
Calm and peaceful, now we leave this place,
Going home, we treasure dearly all the words of grace.⁷⁵⁷

The instructive value of traditional worship was shaped as part of the agenda of returning

⁷⁵² The Russian equivalent means “to instruct, teach, train and improve, especially in moral and religious knowledge; to be edified; edification; edifier” (V.I. Dal', *Tolkovyy slovar' zhivogo velikorusskogo yazyka v chetyrekh tomakh* [Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language in Four Volumes]. I.A. Boduen, ed., vol. 2 (Moskva: Tsitadel', 1998), p. 1086).

⁷⁵³ Acts 2:42a; 1 Cor. 14:3, 19, 31; 1 Thess. 5:11. Along with ‘edification,’ Paul uses terms such as ‘admonish’ or ‘encourage’ one another.

⁷⁵⁴ Q, 2008; QM, 2008.

⁷⁵⁵ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 1-20.

⁷⁵⁶ “O, Spasitel! Blagodat' Na blaguyu vest' izley” [O Savior! Pour out Your Grace on the Good News], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 5, first and second stanzas.

⁷⁵⁷ “My okonchili uchen'ye I domoy poydem” [We Have Had a Time of Learning, Now We Leave This Place], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 712, first and third stanzas and refrain.

to the roots, to New Testament Christianity and the Apostles' teachings,⁷⁵⁸ and through the adoption, through Western channels of influence, of the Reformation approach to the dominance of the Word and "greater verbal freedom in worship."⁷⁵⁹ The edifying tone of public worship in Baptist churches owes its special prominence to the religious context in which this tradition has fought its way forward. Juxtaposing Baptist worship with Orthodox liturgy, Russian-speaking Baptists emphasize that "our worship has no room for some archaic incomprehensible language or complex symbolism which is only clear to the elect."⁷⁶⁰ To answer people's spiritual questions an emphasis is placed on the communication of Bible knowledge in a simple and understandable way, primarily through preaching.

In the recent years, emphasis on edification has acquired a more Western touch due to the influence of such figures as John McArthur⁷⁶¹ and Alexei Kolomiitsev.⁷⁶² In their books, sermons, and conferences they promote the idea of a teaching pastor and expository sermon, and have drawn more attention to the teaching task of the church in general. As with the emphasis on the Bible, "the word of edification"⁷⁶³ is primarily equated with preaching, and as such it represents the corner stone of the worship service. Church members speak about the paramount value of sermons ("good edifying sermons," "sermons that touch the heart").⁷⁶⁴ In church buildings nothing should distract the congregation from hearing the Word. For better absorption of biblical teaching in the Baptist Slavic tradition it is recommended that one stays seated so that an "overtired body would not interfere with perception."⁷⁶⁵ Open Bibles in many people's hands and constant flipping of pages make the parallel between church and school even more evident.

Other components of the service serve the same task. Alexander Karev wrote that "just like preaching, [spiritual singing] should include spiritual edification, i.e. instruction and

⁷⁵⁸ 1 Cor. 14:5, 12, 19; Eph. 5:19. See Karev, "Sviashchennodeistviya tserkvi," p. 36.

⁷⁵⁹ Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life*, p. 114.

⁷⁶⁰ Ivanov, *Dukhovnost' evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov*, p. 18.

⁷⁶¹ John Fullerton MacArthur, Jr. is a popular pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, radio preacher, speaker, author, the president of The Master's College in Santa Clarita and The Master's Seminary in Sun Valley, California. MacArthur has authored or edited more than one hundred books. The MacArthur Study Bible and his series of commentaries on the New Testament are very popular among Russian-speaking preachers. He is held in high regard due to his conservative views about the Bible and creation. See Grace Community Church, official website, <https://www.gracechurch.org>, last accessed 16 May 2019. MacArthur is also famous as a strong proponent of expository preaching. His views are popularized in various ways, including through the School of Preachers in Samara, Novosibirsk Bible Seminary in Russia, Irpen' Bible Seminary in Ukraine, conferences and publishing. Almost all the pastors in Belarus are in the possession of the MacArthur Study Bible and his other books as gifts from the Slavic Gospel Association mission.

⁷⁶² Alexei Kolomiitsev is a pastor-teacher at Bible Church "Word of Grace," Battle Ground, Washington, USA. Kolomiitsev is a graduate of The Master's Seminary in Sun Valley, California. Kolomiitsev's focus is on thorough exegesis of the text, the doctrine which the text teaches, and its application. See "Word of Grace" Church, official website, <http://www.slovo.org>, last accessed 16 May 2019.

⁷⁶³ From the report by M.A. Orlov on his trip to Belarus, *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 3 (1948): 47-48.

⁷⁶⁴ QM, 2008.

⁷⁶⁵ Ivanov, *Dukhovnost' evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov*, p. 19.

doctrine.”⁷⁶⁶ Thus, singing is to edify, and the hymnbook is to be “the first theological textbook.”⁷⁶⁷ Karev described singing as “preaching in music,” “a source of deep instruction.”⁷⁶⁸ Certainly, the purpose of songs is not only edification, praise and thanksgiving are also important aspects. Yet an authoritative figure in AUCECB, musician and composer Nikolai Vysotsky has sought to draw the pastors’ attention to the edifying role of singing, arguing that mere inspiration, “spiritual enjoyment” and “meeting aesthetic needs” is not enough. Rather, it is necessary to strive to maintain a clear edifying, teaching and correcting focus in singing. In Vysotsky’s words, “spiritual singing should be an effective tool for improving the spiritual condition of believers’ lives and work.”⁷⁶⁹

Singing is typically used for augmenting lessons of faith taught through preaching. Toivo Pilli comments that in Baptist and Evangelical Christian traditions singing and music provide a commentary on the preaching and biblical texts.⁷⁷⁰ The person in charge of singing selects and offers hymns that resonate with the message of the sermon and that can help embed these truths in people’s hearts. For example, after the sermon about Jesus as the light of life, a song may be offered which has the following chorus, “But Jesus Shines There Like the Sun.”⁷⁷¹

Prayers which follow a sermon often play a similar role. A sermon about the person of Christ based on the text of John 7:11-17 may be followed by a sister’s prayer about getting to know Christ, following Him and serving Him. The second preacher may speak about a Christian attitude to work, and in the following prayer one of the brothers expresses his desire to glorify God by his attitude to work and by his passionate labor.⁷⁷²

“Truth and beauty can work together”⁷⁷³ in the recitation of poems as well. On average, one or two poems are recited from memory or read in a worship service. This “poetic spiritual edification,”⁷⁷⁴ or “spiritual edification in poetry,”⁷⁷⁵ is intended to facilitate the involvement of more worship participants in active ministry, bring variety to the spiritual diet and strengthen the

⁷⁶⁶ Karev, “Sviashchennodeistviya tserkvi,” p. 38.

⁷⁶⁷ E. Goncharenko, *Muzyka i dukhovnoe vozrastanie tserkvi* [Music and the Spiritual Growth of the Church] (Moskva: Logos, 2002), p. 4.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

⁷⁶⁹ Vysotskiy, “Znachenie i sila dukhovnoy muzyki,” p. 57.

⁷⁷⁰ Pilli, “Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Estonia: The Shaping of Identity, 1945-1991,” p. 157.

⁷⁷¹ “Vot putniki k rodine slavnoy idut” [Here the Pilgrims Come to the Glorious Fatherland], *Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 513.

⁷⁷² Church in Borovliany, Minsk region, Personal visit of the author to the church service, 22 September 2019 (Personal notes, p. 65b). There are two sermons in this rather small congregation (27 members), and they are followed by a congregational prayer.

⁷⁷³ Harris, *Toward an Understanding of Russian Baptist Worship*, p. 6.

⁷⁷⁴ *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 6 (1946), p. 35.

⁷⁷⁵ *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 5 (1946), p. 54.

foundations of faith. As spiritual gifts are given to brothers and sisters for edification,⁷⁷⁶ many people in different ways can mutually edify one another.

6.2.2. *Towards a better theology of edification*

All worship components, contribute to edification. Yet how successful a particular meeting is in this can be questionable. The content of a specific sermon, prayer, or poem can be a surprise,⁷⁷⁷ which may put the edifying nature of worship at risk and become the subject of complaints and grievances among worship participants.⁷⁷⁸ Some songs from the *Song of Revival* Songbook need stylistic corrections as well as replacement or explanation of archaic words and expressions, if they are to edify those who sing, especially in the case of new visitors.⁷⁷⁹

With regard to the effectiveness of edification in preaching, a common criticism voiced concerns the shortage of capable preachers, or the lack of education and training among preachers, as well as their unwillingness to prepare for preaching in advance.⁷⁸⁰ An instructive tone,⁷⁸¹ which is typical of many preachers, also causes congregational resistance, especially with the young people.⁷⁸² They are not content with only instruction because, as expressed in the qualitative research, they need also “cordiality,” “sincerity” and “intensity of feeling.”⁷⁸³ Young people on the whole no longer take the authority of the pulpit for granted and want the preachers to catch their attention and lead. The sermon would be able to meet its goal of edification if those who assign people to preach were to consider the teaching about gifts,⁷⁸⁴ if churches become aware of value of the education and training of preachers, and if the preachers, based on the understanding of the sermon as a gift and art, were to be aware of the importance of sermon preparation. Public prayers are not always edifying either, as they can suffer from lack of depth, and the not insignificant aspects of prayer delivery, the most serious of which is poor audibility due to indistinct speech, weakness of voice and/or the large size of the room. The congregation can also be dispirited by long and identical prayers,⁷⁸⁵ when the same words or phrases are

⁷⁷⁶ 1 Cor. 12:14, 26.

⁷⁷⁷ Because the theme of the worship service is not planned in advance and not necessarily discerned by contributors, the themes of individual components could vary significantly so that the worship participants must be able to switch between various themes.

⁷⁷⁸ In 1981 the President of AUCECB, A.E. Klimenko, remarked that “Unchecked poems and the ones sometimes clearly contradictive to the spirit of our doctrine are recited in worship.” (“Materialy Plenuma AUCECB, Iyun’ 1981 Goda” [Materials of a Plenum of the AUCECB, June 1981], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 5 (1981), p. 59.)

⁷⁷⁹ See *Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya*, nos. 2, 13, 50, 68, 158, 184, 187, 220, 395.

⁷⁸⁰ QM, 2008. Also, Marat Nursultanov, A poll among the members of the Baptist church in Orsha, Vitebsk region (March 2008). Available through the author.

⁷⁸¹ As a secular author observed, specific theological issues in Baptist preaching take a back seat to moral and edifying topics. (L.N. Mitrokhin, ed., *Protestantizm. Slovar’ ateista* [Protestantism. An Atheist’s Vocabulary] (Moskva: Politizdat, 1990), p. 7.)

⁷⁸² Q, 2008.

⁷⁸³ QM, 2008.

⁷⁸⁴ 1 Cor. 12, 13.

⁷⁸⁵ SI, 2012.

repeated by the same persons every meeting, regardless of the context or the topic of the worship service.⁷⁸⁶ With this in mind the author of the article in *Bratskiy Vestnik* says that in worship, only prayers which edify the whole congregation should be pronounced. However, even though the suggestions were expressed more than fifty years ago, the churches are still struggling with the same issues at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Such are prayers about God's work in the whole world, God's workings in our country, the needs of the whole church, needs of this particular community of believers, asking God to bless this worship service, spiritual needs and requests generated by the sermon that has just been delivered, etc.⁷⁸⁷

Poor quality or irrelevant topics are not the only problem. An exaggerated emphasis on edification as instruction may neglect other aspects of worship or an imbalance between worship (believer-to-God activities), fellowship/edification (believer-to-believer activities), and evangelism (believer-to-unbeliever activities).⁷⁸⁸ When the church puts too much emphasis on instruction, worship may be reduced to a class, to intellectual exhortations and teachings on ethics.⁷⁸⁹ But “the classroom is not a viable substitute for sanctuary.”⁷⁹⁰ The pedagogical value of worship cannot replace the spiritual experience of an encounter with God. Authentic worship is not only growth in biblical knowledge and understanding and even application of the Bible lessons in everyday life, but growth in a relationship with the God whom believers worship.

An analysis of the edifying function of public worship and evaluation of its strong and weak dimensions allow two aspects to be singled out that could enrich public worship. First of all, it requires an acknowledgement of the value of edification and an appropriately contextual improving of its standard. Secondly, there needs to be an acknowledgement that the current need in improving the quality of instruction in Belarusian churches should go hand-in-hand with the considerations of other public worship aspects, such as the worship itself, fellowship, and evangelism. After all, “even edification – certainly a worthy purpose – is only a minor part of what worship is all about.”⁷⁹¹ So attention to adoration as part of public worship, to fellowship and evangelism, is going to bring balance to the nature of worship. Enrichment of the practice through various elements will not only edify the mind, but help make use of the imagination and emotions of worship practitioners, leading to worship in which “gesture and object allowed the

⁷⁸⁶ A nickname for such prayers is “tape-recorded,” (Slutsk, SI, 2012).

⁷⁸⁷ V.S., “Voprosy dukhovnoy zhizni” [Issues of Spiritual Life], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 2 (1964): 23.

⁷⁸⁸ Here we take into consideration Cottrell's definition of worship. Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All: Bible Doctrine for Today* (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 2002), p. 443.

⁷⁸⁹ Gerald L. Borchert, “The Lord of Form and Freedom: A New Testament Perspective on Worship,” *Review and Expositors*, 80, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 13.

⁷⁹⁰ André Resner, Jr., “To Worship or To Evangelize? Ecclesiology's Phantom Fork in the Road,” *Restoration Quarterly*, 36 no. 2 (1994): 78.

⁷⁹¹ Barry Liesch, *People in the Presence of God. Models and Directions for Worship* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing Company, 1988), p. 22.

Word to be seen—and indeed handled (1 John 1:1) and tasted (Heb. 6:4f. and 1 Pet. 2:3)—as well as heard.”⁷⁹²

6.3. Evangelism

6.3.1. *Evangelism in life and worship*

Whereas edification focuses on worship in its relation to “insiders,” evangelism focuses on worship in its relation to “outsiders” and plays an equally important role. The joy of proclaiming the gospel, the Good News, has been central to the activity of Russian-speaking evangelicals.⁷⁹³ The Good News was spread during times of both persecution and relative freedom, in public and in secret, in large assemblies and privately. Modern Baptist scholar Mikhail Cherenkov claims that mission, together with personal godliness and conservative theology, is the main characteristic of evangelical Christians.⁷⁹⁴ Spreading the Good News has been a sacred duty;⁷⁹⁵ the principle of the priesthood of all believers allowed every believer to be a witness, an evangelist, or a preacher. One of the many hymns on this expresses the desire to win at least one “lost soul” for the Lord thus:

I would not like come fruitless
To the throne of the Lord,
I would like to carry at least
One sheaf in my hands.⁷⁹⁶

The message is especially clear in hymns sung during the Feast of Harvest which reflects on the theme of fruitfulness. The saved souls are regarded as the most important fruit:

Would I bring no fruit at all when I answer Jesus’ call
On the day when He invites me to come home?
When He asks about my sheaf, what would I have then to give?
How can I come empty-handed when I go?
 Filled with thankfulness to Him who redeemed my soul from sin,
 I would like to work for Jesus all day long,
 So my Master will receive from my hands at least one sheaf
 When He comes again to meet and take me home.⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹² Geoffrey Wainwright, “Renewing Worship: The Recovery of Classical Patterns,” *Theology Today*, no. 48, 1 (April 1991): 46.

⁷⁹³ N. Bortkovsky, “Shtundobaptizm” [Stundobaptists], in *Russkiye sektanty, ih uchenie, kul’t i sposoby propogandy* [Russian sectarians: Their Teaching, Cult and Propaganda Techniques] ed. and pub. M.A Kal’nev (Odessa: Y.I. Fesenko’s printing office, 2011), p. 117.

⁷⁹⁴ Cherenkov, *Evropeis’ka reformatsiya ta ukrains’kiy evangel’s’kiy protestantizm*, p. 64.

⁷⁹⁵ See footnote 1011.

⁷⁹⁶ Originally written as “Must I Go, and Empty-handed?” *Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 656, first stanza.

⁷⁹⁷ “Neuzheli bez plodov,” *Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 744, first and third stanzas.

Such eagerness frequently triggered negative responses both from Orthodox and secular circles. At the beginning of the twentieth century Orthodox writers warned that “our Orthodox Church is being attacked by a large horde of trained and experienced missionaries,”⁷⁹⁸ and that “Shtundobaptists are the most dangerous group, in terms of their missionary organizations.”⁷⁹⁹ At the end of the twentieth century, a Belarusian researcher, referring to such groups as Baptists, speaks of “religious expansionism” and “aggressively militant mission.”⁸⁰⁰

Evangelistic activity has been tightly linked to eschatological expectations, looking forward to Christ’s imminent Second Coming, to which persecution added special color. A sense of brevity of time contributed to the desire to place all of life on the altar of Christian witness. In the light of the strong belief in salvation in Christ alone, each believer had to do their best in their duty of saving people, especially family members and neighbors:

We live to share the Holy Word with others
Who are dying in sin, despair and hopelessness.
Let us equip ourselves and one another
To serve our Lord in trials and distress.
This life is difficult and offers little comfort,
But we are here to labor, not to feast -
We see this world and so keep pressing onward
To save the lost and bring them love and peace.⁸⁰¹

The key motive for sharing the Gospel was one’s personal conversion experience with its contrast with life before conversion. Generally, a transformed life as a result of conversion is a key concept in the Baptist tradition. When in 1978 the Council of ECB Churches published a hymnal, which became especially popular in the Soviet and post-Soviet times, it was named *Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya*, that is, “Song of Rebirth” or “Revival.” Evangelical Christians saw the Good News as a power that can transform lives, and their personal experience pushed them to lead others to repentance and salvation. They understood the Great Commission as their personal duty. As “New Testament Christians,” they preached salvation, in their understanding following the model of early Christian churches, because the call to “repent and believe in the Gospel”⁸⁰² “was constantly heard in the worship of the first Christians.”⁸⁰³ Their worship reflected the desire to “save the lost,” not just to spread the Baptist faith. Indeed, if the structure of a traditional worship service is more a reflection of the principle of edification, the spirit of the service is

⁷⁹⁸ Bortkovsky, “Shtundobaptizm,” p. 117.

⁷⁹⁹ *Mogilevskie eparhial’nye vedomosti* [Mogilev Diocese Gazette], no. 21 (1910), p. 341.

⁸⁰⁰ Rekuts, *Protestantizm i khudozhestvennaya kul’tura Belarusi*, p. 3.

⁸⁰¹ “Nam zhizn’ dana ne dlya pustykh mechtaniy” [We Are Not Granted This Life for Day Dreaming], *Pesn’ Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 792, third and fifth stanzas.

⁸⁰² Mark 1:15.

⁸⁰³ Somov, “Tserkov’ Khrista i ego Svyashchenstvo,” p. 54.

marked by a “distinct revivalist flare.”⁸⁰⁴

The evangelistic focus of Baptist worship was particularly dominant in many churches in the first decade after *perestroika*. Following the example of Luke 14:23, evangelistic activities of church members may involve inviting family, friends, neighbors and others to the house of prayer.⁸⁰⁵ Evangelism and worship are seen to be tightly interwoven. In the words of Rick Warren, whose books have gained significant popularity in Belarus, “evangelism “produce[s] worshipers of God,” and worship “provides the motivation for evangelism.”⁸⁰⁶

6.3.2. *Worship as evangelism*

When examining the relationship between worship and evangelism, it is worth mentioning the tradition of evangelistic services, which, in turn, can be further divided into specialized meetings held in certain places at a certain time, and meetings in place of regular worship services. As early as 1910, an Orthodox magazine reported the methods of sectarians, noting that one might open a small shop “and then stop everyone entering by talking about faith or reading from the Gospel that which would be especially eye-catching for those without deep understanding in religious questions . . . Another arranges a prayer meeting with the preaching and reading of the Gospel near his house in the open air in summer.”⁸⁰⁷ The article continues:

In recent times, sectarian missionaries make their trips with well-organized choirs and dozens of young men preparing for preaching. Live improvisations by fanatics are abundantly interspersed with biblical texts, and their simple, touching, sad, melodic tunes produce compelling, deep impressions upon people. To this must be added that sectarians sing their psalms and cantatas with great religious enthusiasm, with a nervous tremor in their voices and tears in their eyes. This is a secret of their success and extraordinary influence on people.⁸⁰⁸

Depending on opportunities, meetings for evangelistic purposes have been held outside church buildings, on the street and church grounds, in parks, clubs and stadiums, as well as on public transportation. Iosif Bondarenko, a Baptist evangelist who spent a total of nine years in prison between 1962 and 1981, reports the activities that led to one of his charges:

Believers gathered together in large groups in the woods near the city and in public places of summer

⁸⁰⁴ Nichols, “Evangelical Spirituality and Russian Baptists,” p. 206. According to Nichols, the evangelistic spirit was largely shaped by “the early influences of the Keswick Holiness movement and the Evangelical Alliance on the early leaders of baptistic communities in the Russian-speaking world.” (Ibid.) This point of view is also shared by Walter Sawatsky, a researcher of the Russian-speaking Baptist movement: *Evangelicheskoye dvizheniye v SSSR posle Vtoroy mirovoy voyny*, p. 396.

⁸⁰⁵ “And the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel *them* to come in, so that my house may be filled.’”

⁸⁰⁶ Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 242.

⁸⁰⁷ *Mogilevskie eparhial'nye vedomosti*, no. 21 (1910), p. 717.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 716.

recreation. Led by the defendants, they put up banners with Bible passages, engaged in loud readings and choir singing of hymns accompanied by an orchestra. They were involved in similar activities at railway stations and in electric train carriages.⁸⁰⁹

Even weddings and funerals could be turned into occasions for evangelism. As the critics of Baptists have pointed out, “In order to promote their religious activities, sectarians also use their baptisms, weddings, funerals, etc., making them as solemn as possible. People come to such events as spectators and they propagate their teaching among them, ‘hunting for people’s souls’.”⁸¹⁰ Similarly, Baptists were also accused of “turning their funeral processions into evangelistic prayer meetings” as a tool to witness. For example, under the act of Zelva town council of April 1986, a member of an unregistered Baptist community, P.V. Mosko, was held administratively liable for “organizing a funeral procession with singing in the town of Zelva [Grodno region].”⁸¹¹ The practice, particularly common during the Soviet times, is sometimes still observed today.⁸¹²

Evangelistic purposes were served by special meetings in the houses of prayer. An Orthodox missionary asked in 1911, “Do we need to say how strong and lasting is the impression produced on the souls of visitors by such celebrations with prayer, kneeling, choral singing and inspirational preaching?”⁸¹³ A circular of the Tzarist Ministry of Internal Affairs reported that “under the guise of worship and prayer meetings, sectarians hold public meetings for fellowship, reading and discussion of religious topics, which do not function as worship services or devotional meetings.”⁸¹⁴ Later Soviet observers in Vitebsk described an example of “evangelicals and Baptists organizing evenings, which they call ‘literary soirees,’ where there are

individual and collective recitals of religious poetry, solo, choir and group singing, and speeches by pastors and some sectarians, etc. These sects also use other forms and methods of propaganda and agitation, such as religious drama (passion plays), music and choir. They even have a piano in their houses of prayer. Following the orders of their leaders, sectarians invite youth and adults to these evenings.⁸¹⁵

Evangelistic meetings are different from regular ones, not just because of their special focus, but also marked out by better preparation, orderliness, careful selection of contributors

⁸⁰⁹ Bondarenko, *Tri prigovora*, p. 174.

⁸¹⁰ F.I. Garkavenko, *Khristianskoe sektanstvo v SSSR*. Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata filosofskikh nauk [Christian Sectarianism in the USSR. Dissertation for the Degree of Candidate of Philosophical Sciences] (Moskva: Institut narodnogo khozyaistva im. G.V. Plekhanova, 1964), p. 14.

⁸¹¹ Report of an inspector of the Council for Religious Affairs, 16 April 1986, NARB, Stock 136, File 1, Case 88, pp. 120-122.

⁸¹² On March 12, 2011, the author was informed by his mother that in the village of Lipniki, Brest region, evangelicals organized a solemn funeral procession for one of the local people; as they passed through the village, they sang and preached in the backyard of a private house and at the cemetery (Personal notes, p. 47).

⁸¹³ Bortkovskiy, “Shtundobaptizm,” p. 116.

⁸¹⁴ NHAB, Stock 295, File 8462, Case 1, p. 6, July 10, 1913 – November 11, 1914.

⁸¹⁵ Khaytun and Kapayevich, *Suchasnae sektantstva na Belarusi*, p. 44.

and songs, and altered structure (more music, less preaching and prayer, and an inclusion of testimonies). However, regular meetings also have an evangelistic aspect and are conducted in an evangelistic spirit. All the aspects of public worship, from the space itself to a call to repentance, could fulfill an evangelistic purpose. The walls of prayer houses decorated with Scriptures announce the closeness and inevitability of the Second Coming and the need of repentance.⁸¹⁶ Other passages may be warning that the time to repent is today,⁸¹⁷ or speak about God's love, Christ's death, and faith through which salvation is made possible.⁸¹⁸

Congregational singing also becomes an intentional tool for evangelism. "Call to Repentance," the largest of the thematic sections in *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, includes ninety songs. In comparison, sections, such as "About the Church" and "Call to Work" contain only eleven and thirty-two songs, respectively. Evangelistic aspects are strongly expressed in other sections too, particularly in the "Youth Songs." It is assumed that hymns sung before preaching are to "soften hearts of stone" so that people may receive the Word of truth. When a sermon is followed by a call to repentance, a "call song" which elicits tears of repentance is often sung while penitent sinners are invited to come forward and repent. Such popular "call songs" include "Neuzheli uydes' ty ne prinyav Khrista" (Are You Really Going to Leave without Accepting Christ?), "Chto ty medlish' na greshnom puti" (Why Are You Lingered on Your Sinful Way?), "Put' ko spasen'yu novyy, zhivoy," (Way to Salvation, New and Living), "Khochet vsek' lyudey Gospod' blagoslovit'" (The Lord Wants to Bless All People),⁸¹⁹ amongst others. Along with congregational singing, "choral singing is called not only to affect people's feelings, but also make them think, analyze their life, draw conclusions and confess their sins before the Lord."⁸²⁰ Furthermore, "if choral singing does not affect listener's deep and secret feelings, but only pleases their ear, it does not fulfill its purpose and brings no glory to God."⁸²¹ Such "heartfelt" singing is to resonate with worship participants present in the house of prayer as well as with occasional passers-by.⁸²²

Even the opponents of Baptists in various periods of time acknowledged the power and

⁸¹⁶ "And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book" (Rev. 22:7); "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15); "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

⁸¹⁷ "For it is time to seek the LORD" (Hosea 10:12b).

⁸¹⁸ "God is love" (1 John 4:8b); "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16); "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17); "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3b). Information gathered from Q, 2008.

⁸¹⁹ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, nos. 956, 381, 295, 346.

⁸²⁰ B. K., "O muzyke i penii" [On Music and Singing], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 1 (1977), p. 69.

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

⁸²² Typical testimonies would go along the following lines: "I was walking by the house of prayer and heard some singing, so I came in ..."; "I heard young people sing in a square. I was so impressed by their songs that I came to their worship service and repented a few months later."

effect of their singing and rightly stressed the value of singing as an art:

A believer's esthetic feeling is given a special direction during public worship; it serves as one of the ways of perceiving religious ideas and images. Esthetic feelings and esthetic perception foster and strengthen religious faith, drawing it into the domain of influence of a preacher's ideas. As A.M. Gorky stated at the 2nd National Congress of the Union of Militant Atheists (1930), "Undoubtedly, many people convert to religion for esthetical reasons because churches have good singing."⁸²³

Testimonies, typically about significant episodes of life that illustrate how God has worked in a believer's life, are less customary in traditional Baptist worship. The testimony of conversion is the most common kind of testimony and it becomes a powerful tool to attract others through the experience a former sinner who "was a bad person, had no happiness in life, but repented and received joy and happiness in life with God."⁸²⁴

However, preaching is regarded as the most important tool of evangelism, both by the Baptists themselves as well as less-than-sympathetic critics.⁸²⁵ In the analysis of sermons for the communities in Brest, Pinsk, Baranovichi, Pruzhany, and Ivanovo, Brest region in 1986, Deputy Commissioner for Religious Affairs highlighted the fact that "sermons had a clear missionary vector and the speakers devoted most of their time to brainwashing people who 'still do not have Christ in their hearts.'"⁸²⁶ Sermons would frequently underline the danger of delay. "The last invitation" is announced;⁸²⁷ "now," "today" is the time to come to Jesus because it may be too late tomorrow—the "grim reaper" may come or Jesus Christ may return.⁸²⁸

The final sermon may include a call to repentance, or it can be used as an independent element at the end of the service. The preacher may invite those who want to repent and confess their sins before God and the church to come forward to the pulpit and to pray, confessing their sins and asking that God forgive them.⁸²⁹ After that a church minister prays and the congregation sings a stanza and the refrain of "Radostnuyu pesn' vospoyte v nebesakh! Bludnyy syn naveki vozvrashchen" (Sing a Joyful Song in Heaven! The Prodigal Son Is Back Forever).⁸³⁰ When a

⁸²³ Fedorenko, *Sekty, ih vera i dela* [Sects, Their Faith and Acts] (Moskva: Political Literature Publisher, 1965), p. 340; M. Gorkiy, *O religii* [On Religion] (Moskva: Gosudarstvennyy anti-religioznyy izdatel'skiy dom, 1941), p. 186.

⁸²⁴ Q, 2008.

⁸²⁵ Cf. the English Separatist tradition (McKibbens, "Our Baptist Heritage in Worship," p. 64).

⁸²⁶ NARB, Stock 136, File 1, Case 88, pp. 150-155.

⁸²⁷ "Posledniy prizyv razdayetsya yeshche" [Last Call Is Still Given], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 375.

⁸²⁸ The words of a well-known hymn which calls sinners to repentance confirm this idea:

The Sun will cease to give its light one day,
And darkness comes to sweep all things away,
When night falls down, the gate will soon be closed,
And you will hear a cry behind the doors:

There is no place! No place, the gate is closed! "Yest' mesto, yest'! Gospod' v chertog zovet" [There Is a Place, Yes Indeed! The Lord Is Calling to the Chamber], *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, p. 298, fifth stanza.

⁸²⁹ The practice of public repentance (*pokayaniye*) is quite specific to the Russian-speaking Baptist life. It is an important step on the way to baptism and church membership. For more about repentance as public event see Khrapov, *Dom Bozhii i sluzhenie v nem*, ch. 4.

⁸³⁰ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 389.

woman publicly repents, a different stanza is sung, which refers to “The Lost Sheep” rather than the prodigal son. Sometimes repentance is made without a call, when a person comes to the front during the singing or even after the closing pastoral prayer, and says they would like to pray a prayer of repentance. There are also, as one pastor put it, “arranged repentances:” a person who wants to repent may inform the pastor before worship and ask the pastor to make a call.⁸³¹

Calls to repentance were particularly emotional at the beginning of *perestroika*. Repeating the same verse or singing several hymns at the time of the call was a common practice in order to build up emotion and encourage public repentance. Every so often the preacher would repeat the words of the call and the choir or the congregation would echo the call:

Will you leave at this hour,
Will you leave at this hour,
Will you leave at this hour and reject Jesus' call?
Will you leave at this hour?⁸³²

Your time is now, your time is now,
Jesus' arms are open for you!
Your time is now, your time is now,
Come before night comes into view.⁸³³

Such persistence was often followed by large groups of people coming to the pulpit or onto the stage. However, preliminary research in Belarusian churches confirms the insignificance of public events in terms of their contribution to church growth,⁸³⁴ although it is still possible that negative evaluations of evangelistic events might be down to setting too high expectations on them and to a lack of understanding of their role in the spiritual life of people.⁸³⁵

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, calls to repentance have diminished, and the evangelistic activity of Baptist churches has lost some of its dynamics. Accumulated over sixty years, from the reinforcement of persecution in 1928 to the celebration

⁸³¹ Alexander Gelement, Personal interview by author, Pinsk, Brest region, 30 October 2016 (Personal notes, p. 47).

⁸³² “Neuzheli uydesh', ty ne prinyav Khrista,” *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 956, refrain.

⁸³³ “Chto ty medlish' na greshnom puti,” *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, no. 381, refrain.

⁸³⁴ Sergei Luk'yanov, pastor of “New Testament church” in Minsk, conducted a survey among the participants of youth conferences in Minsk in 2017-2018. He claims that approximately 80% of people has come to the ECB church in Belarus from parachurch environment and through parents or Christian grandparents. About 10% of people have Christian relatives, neighbors, and coworkers. And only 8.4% came “out of the world.” According to Luk'yanov, only “friendly evangelism” makes sense. People come to Christ through friendly and long-term relationships and only a small part of them come as a result of various public events. (Personal interview with author, Minsk, 21 May 2019 [Personal notes, p. 47].) The Board of the Baptist Union discussed this issue at its meeting on 21st May 2019. (Minute of the Council of the ECB Union in Belarus, no. 141 (21 May 2019).

⁸³⁵ About different approaches to evangelism in Slavic culture late 20th – early 21st centuries, including mass evangelistic meetings, see V.I. Komisarenko, “Osobennosti blagovestiya v russkoy kul'ture” [Special Characteristics of Evangelism in Russian Culture], *Bogomyslie* [Contemplation of God], no. 10 (2004): 60-87. Komisarenko, a graduate of Moscow Theological Seminary, expressed in 2004 the opinion that the time “of loud evangelistic crusades” had passed. (Ibid., p. 86.) For better understanding of the mission see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992).

of the Millennium of Christianity in Russia in 1988, this evangelistic energy expanded with great force in the early 1990s, but twenty years later its power has declined. Calls to repentance are made less frequently, usually at special services or during Christian holidays, and they tend to be more gentle. The call may not require going forward to the pulpit and public prayers. Sometimes it is sufficient to raise a hand or pray silently and then, after the meeting, to meet and talk to the ministers.

The weakening of evangelistic motivation is related to several factors. Firstly, the absence of persecution has diminished eschatological expectations. The feeling of shortness of time has subsided, and so has the understanding of the urgency in the matter of salvation of the lost.⁸³⁶ Secondly, the church, especially ministers, have faced the need to resolve many new problems which have taken their focus away from evangelistic ministry, such as organizational and legal issues related to the registration of churches and related organizations, and especially to the construction of houses of prayer, and particularly the struggle with the lack of funds, including a decrease in support from Western churches coupled with a sharp increase in the cost of construction and maintenance of church buildings.⁸³⁷ Thirdly, the churches seem to be losing confidence as they are confronted by the decreased effectiveness of evangelism in the twenty-first century and the loss of the “sheaves” gathered before.⁸³⁸ Fourthly, the human resources accumulated before *perestroika* have been extensively exhausted, and the training of new leaders has become a daunting task which cannot be solved solely within the walls of theological schools. Of course, the situation would be even worse without the 1,465 graduates of Baptist schools of the Union, who have undergone theological studies between 1991 and 2017.⁸³⁹

⁸³⁶ In recent years preachers have spoken less of the Second Coming (QM, 2012). Cf. sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3.

⁸³⁷ See footnote 616.

⁸³⁸ Konstantin Teteryatnikov, former Dean of the Bible College in Kremenchug, Ukraine, lists the reasons for lack of effectiveness. They include Eastern Orthodox influence, and also rationalism and pragmatism, which characterize Western culture underlying mass evangelism. (Teteryatnikov, ‘Blagovestiye: vchera i segodnya’ [Evangelism: Yesterday and Today] <https://www.christianmegapolis.com//благовестие-вчера-и-сегодня/>, 01.02.2011, last accessed 30 September 2019.) Cf. section 3.3.1, especially the similar claim by Milovidov, footnote 271. Oleg Turlac suggests that the arrival of new people in church was influenced by a change in the religious climate (the spiritual hunger, characteristic of the 1990s, has dried up), and by the increasing role of the Orthodox Church in cultural, political and social life. (http://www.bethel.md/view_post.php?id=26, last accessed 2 September 2010.) In turn, some churches were not ready to assimilate new people. The case of the Baptist Church in Kopyl, Minsk region, cannot be called typical but it gives some idea of the problem. By 2010 this church had only twelve members. At the same time, according to the pastor, for a decade the same number of people had been excommunicated for “unchristian behavior” and disregard of meetings, i.e., almost all the people who came to the church after the *perestroika*, have been lost. (Alexander Vislaus, Personal interview with author, Kopyl, 22 April 2012 [Personal notes, p. 47].) Veniamin Komisarenko believed that the Baptists were not ready to change their minds, or to use new approaches in ministry to people, they rather used the method of prohibitions that had worked in former days. (Komisarenko, “Osobennosti blagovestiya v russkoy kul'ture” [Special Characteristics of Evangelism in Russian Culture] p. 61.

⁸³⁹ In speaking about potential ministers, we should make a note that many talented and gifted ministers emigrated to the United States. As the pastor reports, from 1990 to 2005 about one hundred fifty families from the church on Fortechnaya 61/1, Brest, emigrated to America (Viktor Zdanevich, Personal interview with author, Brest, 4 October 2019 [Personal notes, p. 47b].) From 1990 to the present, about two hundred persons, including small children, have emigrated from the church on Mopra in Pinsk, (Anatoliy Filanovich, Personal interview with author,

Fifthly, many members who were active in the past as evangelists and missionaries have transferred to work in educational institutions or Christian mission organizations, which may participate in evangelization indirectly, but lack time for personal contact with unbelievers. Furthermore, as the ‘effectiveness’ of the call to repentance in the house of prayer has decreased, lack of response disappoints the congregation and preachers who simply do not want to take chances again. For a preacher, it is safer to replace calls to repentance by calls to holiness and faithfulness in following the Lord which do not require open response in the meeting. These kinds of changes are evident from my own ministry experience of the past thirty years. Moreover, a new generation of preachers who emerged after *perestroika* lack the skills for evangelistic preaching, and neither have the experience or involvement in evangelism, nor examples to follow.⁸⁴⁰

On the whole the focus of the worship service is shifting from evangelism to edification, “from the achievement of external objectives to the solution of internal church issues.”⁸⁴¹ Traditional churches begin to pay more attention to teaching and striving for “pure doctrine,”⁸⁴² protecting churches from the influence of the ‘sinful world’ in attempt to maintain identity.⁸⁴³ Nevertheless, in spite of all the changes, public worship remains an important tool for evangelism, particularly as other methods are not as well-developed, especially those involving going outside the church. The church has many years of experience of using this public worship form of evangelism, so it still has a strong evangelistic potential, primarily contained in its tradition of preaching, testimonies and music ministry.

In its historical context, an evangelistic focus in public worship has contributed to a reductive understanding of mission. It has encouraged a theology of evangelism as proclamation. Social ministry, small group ministry, cultivation of friendships and personal relationships

Pinsk, 12 July 2018 [Personal notes, p.]

⁸⁴⁰ Now “coming forward” in the meeting is being replaced by other forms of repentance. Teenagers and young people more often “make confessions” in children’s and youth camps. This is also associated with “coming forward,” but it usually happens in a group when dozens come to repent, and the number of observers is smaller than in the regular worship in the house of prayer. Repentance in small groups or just at home is usually reported later to ministers. Such new trends can have positive outcomes because many people find it difficult to overcome psychological barriers and come forward during public worship in church. Besides ministers now “pressure” people less, wishing to avoid excessively hasty, emotional decisions.

⁸⁴¹ Vladimir Ubeivolt, “Rethinking Missio Dei among Evangelical Churches In an Eastern European Orthodox Context,” (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2011), p. 64.

⁸⁴² In this regard it is interesting to note the difference between churches in the south and in the center and north of Belarus. Emotional expression and evangelistic emphasis are more developed in churches in the south-west of the country, whereas churches in Minsk and in the northern part of Belarus tend to be more concerned with doctrinal purity. They may choose a position of defence since they are small or lack strength and they are careful not to lose their identity. Historic period and the size of church also play an important role. In the Soviet days when attending public worship was often bound up with many problems, the Christians had special appreciation for fellowship. Fellowship and occasions for people to meet each other and get involved are still important in small churches.

⁸⁴³ Paradoxically, such attempts to preserve identity through the construction of protective walls lead to loss of identity, if we seriously take mission as one of the “persistent marks” of the Baptists. McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 19-21, 25-35.

(already limited due to the clear distinction between Christians and non-Christians in Soviet times), and even more so working for societal transformation, education, and awareness raising generally has remained beyond the view of the church.⁸⁴⁴ As Keith Jones has pointed out, “there is a grave temptation for us to mix up the worship of believers in Spirit in Truth with the pre-evangelism or evangelism of Paul on Mars Hill, rather than the synagogue at Capernaum, or the Basilica in Alexandria.”⁸⁴⁵ So the way to balanced and integrated public worship begins with rethinking the purposes of worship and the place of evangelism in community meetings. Evangelism can be one of the aspects of public worship and not its purpose; it is a natural consequence of the worship of the faithful. It can be argued that the worship meeting is directed to God, and relationship dynamics and dialogue between the Lord and Christians awaken faith in those present and encourage them to join the dialogue.

6.4. Simplicity

6.4.1. Pursuit of the “gospel simplicity”

The last of the determinative principles of traditional public worship is that of simplicity. Belarusian Baptists believe that “God wants to see decency, modesty, and simplicity in worship.”⁸⁴⁶ When a Soviet researcher compared the worship of the Baptists and the Orthodox, he noted that Baptists had adapted it more to the masses “by simplification and reduction of rites.” In his opinion, this was done in order to attract more believers by its “democratic style and availability.”⁸⁴⁷

This comparison is a good way to understand the idea of simplicity from a Baptist point of view. Radical differences can be noted beginning with the space of worship, which was especially conspicuous in the early origins of the Shtundo-baptist movement in the Russian Empire. At the end of the nineteenth century, Orthodox priest A. Rozhdestvensky, who studied the origin of Shtundism, noted that services are held in houses, “which from the outside are not different from regular ones,” and “the furniture of the facilities in which the sectarians gather for

⁸⁴⁴ Lina Andronoviene and Parush R. Parushev discuss the reasons for such “mentality of seclusion and secrecy” in their very helpful article “Church, State, and Culture: On the Complexities of Post-Soviet Evangelical Social Involvement,” *Bogoslovskie razmyshleniya* [Theological Reflections], no. 3 (2004): 161-213. In their opinion, social activity in church could be regarded as a threat to holiness (Ibid., p. 199). However, if we talk about the involvement of Belarusian churches in the society in the second decade of the 21st century, it should be noted that churches are beginning to rethink their mission and as a result mercy ministry outside the houses of prayer is gaining momentum. Some churches develop ministry with the disabled, the homeless or visit orphanages. In 2019 there are five functioning rehabilitation centers for alcoholics at the Baptist Union of Belarus.

⁸⁴⁵ Keith G. Jones, “On Abandoning Public Worship,” in *Currents in Baptist Theology of Worship Today*, ed. Jones and Parushev, p. 8.

⁸⁴⁶ Q, 2008.

⁸⁴⁷ Belov, *Sekty, sektantstvo, sektanty*, p. 88.

prayer, is very simple: benches, wooden chairs, and a table with the Bible and the spiritual song books on it.”⁸⁴⁸ In small Baptist churches, the worship space has not fundamentally changed in over a hundred years. Only a few new things have been introduced, such as electricity and sometimes central heating and water facilities.⁸⁴⁹

Emphasis on simplicity is especially evident in contrast to the Orthodox tradition and its “synthesis of ritual, art, church, design, and symbolic structure”⁸⁵⁰ which gives birth to icons, holy vessels, devotional articles which together with sacred garments, their colors, and the structure of the sanctuary are filled with deep meaning and significance. In Baptist churches, on the other hand, the primary role in public worship is assigned to the verbal components—namely, sermons, songs, prayers, and poems. If choir members wear special robes, their colors and design reflect a certain aesthetic expression, comfort and decency, and have no sacral meaning. Even though such objects as a cross bear symbolic meaning, they do not play any specific role in the worship itself.

Some Baptists apply the idea of simplicity to the content of the worship components, defending the idea of an “uneducated faith” which stems out of an assumption that only a simple-hearted, naïve, and therefore completely sincere person can come to Christ and know his love. One popular poem expresses this idea:

You have studied serious questions,
You have achieved much in your meditations,
But it should only take a simple joyful step of faith
As a child, run to Jesus, and get on His path.
 You will see the rugged cross
 And hear a groan of the Son of God,
 Then you will understand how sinful and insignificant you are,
 Standing before eternal and holy love.⁸⁵¹

Thus, to approach and comprehend God’s Word requires humility and putting aside one’s reason and intellect. As Toivo Pilli puts it: “In a somewhat naïve but sincere way [Baptists] believed that obedience to this ‘plain meaning’ is of prime importance, and they paid much less attention to the process of interpreting the text.”⁸⁵² More than that; such an approach was accompanied by the fear that either mystical or aesthetic experiences, or rationalism might endanger true spirituality.

⁸⁴⁸ Rozhdestvensky, *Yuzhnorussky Shtundism*, p. 243

⁸⁴⁹ Churches in Osovo, Starye Terushki, Zabashevichi, Kopyl', Minsk region; Svyatopolka, Gantsevichi, Brest region; Braslav, Vitebsk region.

⁸⁵⁰ Taft, “‘Eastern Presuppositions’ and Western Liturgical Renewal,” <http://www.archeparchy.ca/documents/Taft%20Eastern%20Presuppositions.pdf>, last accessed 30 January 2011.

⁸⁵¹ Galina Vezikova, “V poiskakh puti” [In Search of the Way], <http://www.blagovestnik.org/books/00430/db/v4599835.html>, last accessed 16 May 2019.

⁸⁵² Pilli, “Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Estonia: The Shaping of Identity, 1945-1991,” p. 164.

An emphasis on simplicity has been conditioned first of all by the evangelical heritage, an opposition to the Orthodox Church and its practice, and the context of persecution. Russian-speaking Baptists are part of a broad evangelical tradition into which, in the context of opposition to traditional or state churches, was planted the idea of returning to “the original simplicity.” Russian-speaking author, Victor Leahu, justly criticizing the theological and aesthetic poverty of some evangelical churches, looks for its reasons in historical development. He notes: “As it seems to me early Protestantism, possessed by reforms and perfectionism, unconsciously set a precedent for public worship simplification as a foundation of its experience of faith.”⁸⁵³ Simplicity in worship was promoted by such influential leaders as Ivan Prokhanov and Vasiliy Pavlov and, before them, simplicity was the hallmark of the aristocratic evangelical community in St. Petersburg because it represented their understanding of New Testament worship.⁸⁵⁴

Striving toward simplicity can be understood better by attending to the religious context in which the Russian-speaking evangelical Baptist movement developed. The early evangelicals in Belarus were converts from the Orthodox Church. Magnificent buildings, paintings and icons, elaborate costumes impressed them perhaps only as aesthetic and cultural achievements.⁸⁵⁵ An author of a popular research among Russian-speaking evangelical Christians, in arguing that the Orthodox and Catholic Churches have drifted away from the Gospel, put it this way:

Modest evangelical public worship, the main purpose of which is reading the Word of God, singing davidic psalms, and common prayer, was gradually enforced by the pompousness of the rituals and rites set by the [official] Church.⁸⁵⁶

Or, as expressed by a Russian Baptist historian, in the Orthodox tradition “the Bible was relegated to the background, for there was no time to do a deep study of it at public worship, ceremonial ritual became too complicated, and only some Scripture passages were read for the edification of believers.”⁸⁵⁷ It follows then that in order to overcome the gap between worship and life, elaborate liturgical practice should be dismissed out of hand and in order to go back to “gospel simplicity,” rituals and ceremonies must be removed.

Adverse circumstances have also influenced worship in Belarus. Here a parallel can be drawn with the Puritan worship of early Baptists in England and the simplicity of their worship which was impacted by their experience of persecution between 1660 and 1688. Having to

⁸⁵³ Leahu, “K voprosu o vzaimodeistvii teologii bogoslužheniya i teologii kul’tury ...,” p. 49.

⁸⁵⁴ *Novoe vremya*, no. 802 [The New Time, no. 802] (May 23, 1878), in *Vestnik Istiny*, no. 6 (2007): 38.

⁸⁵⁵ On the complexity of differentiating between the religious and the aesthetic, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 38.

⁸⁵⁶ Pavel Rogozin, *Otkuda vse eto poyavilos’?* [Where Did It All Come from?] (Gummersbach: Missiya Vestnik Mira, 1996), p. 144.

⁸⁵⁷ Somov, “Tserkov’ Khrista i ego Svyashchenstvo,” p. 61.

worship in secret contributed to the focus on only the essential aspects.⁸⁵⁸ In the same way times of severe persecution and repressions, for example of Christians in the Soviet Union beginning in 1928, have resulted in a very simple form, as well as environment, of worship. There were few opportunities (including financial ones) for a conscious enrichment of the tradition or for developing forms.⁸⁵⁹ The meeting place itself did not encourage splendor and elaborate rituals, since people were gathered in private houses or small church buildings, sometimes in secret or having to keep changing the location of their gatherings. In this context of repression and persecution, sophistication, elegance, and rich finish were therefore seen to be in contradiction to “the way of suffering” and the essence of faith as it was understood by the Baptists. The agenda was simply to *have* a communal experience of worship. Thus, the context of persecution as well as opposition to Eastern Orthodoxy shaped the style of Baptist public worship, fostering an emphasis on modesty and simplicity.

6.4.2. From oversimplification to creditable simplicity

Strong emphasis on simplicity can lead to a loss of the depth and wealth of meanings inherent to a communal act of worship. In the desire to be simple in its elements, worship tends not to make use of all the sensory and symbolic resources that are available, nor harness the potential for exploring diverse and creative ways of expressing faith within a worship service. The “gospel simplicity” principle becomes, in essence, a defence of impoverished practice from a theological, literary or aesthetic point of view. It may not be surprising, therefore, that Andrey Kuraev, an Orthodox theologian, missionary, and former professor at Moscow Orthodox Theological Academy, has accused Russian-speaking evangelicals of replacing

an ancient and aesthetically beautiful universal rite by a poor, cold, commonplace equivalent...So our sectarians replace the divine beauty of Orthodox liturgy by boring and vapid ‘psalms’ and bare protestant ritual.⁸⁶⁰

Different components of worship can suffer from an unreflected pursuit of simplicity. The very popular practice of reciting poems can serve as an example. Along with profound

⁸⁵⁸ Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 32.

⁸⁵⁹ Alexander Schmemmann gives an illustration of the influence of difficult circumstances even on Orthodox worship as he considers his early worship experience in Paris: “In the first years of the Russian emigration, when worship had to be celebrated in cellars and garages converted into churches, we became aware of the complete impossibility of celebrating it “as it should be,” according to all the canons of elegance and solemnity proper to the synodical style of Russian Orthodoxy.” (Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, pp. 118-119.) He discusses the issue of the relationship between worship and the place of worship and comes to the conclusion that abandoning simplicity was, in fact, inevitable: “But in the great, magnificent and indeed solemn basilicas the complication and ‘decoration’ of worship was inevitable, if only because if it had been celebrated in the old way it simply would not have reached the eyes and ears of those assembled.” (Ibid., p. 119.)

⁸⁶⁰ Andrei Kuraev, *Protestantam o pravoslavii. Nasledie Khrista* [To Protestants on Orthodoxy. Legacy of Christ] (Klin: “Khristianskaya zhizn’,” 2006), pp. 241-242.

creations by famous Russian poets⁸⁶¹ and evangelical Russian classics⁸⁶² one can also hear poems of very poor quality in terms of their literary value or theological merit.⁸⁶³ Secular researchers on Russian-speaking Baptists have also observed that the poems created by ordinary Christians reflect their views and emotions with “primitivism, naivete of ‘philosophizing,’ and poor composition.”⁸⁶⁴ To illustrate their point they mention poems with such titles as “Tri schastlivtza” (Three Lucky Men) and “Mne mama v detstve govorila” (My Mom Told Me When I Was a Child).⁸⁶⁵

The key element—the sermon—also often suffers from “the lack of illustrations from life, the lack of practical applications, poor interpretation, monotony, the lack of oratory skill, preparation, etc.”⁸⁶⁶ In the words of a school teacher who is a member of the Baptist church in Berezino, Minsk region, “you want to listen to properly composed and developed sermons, not to mention their content.”⁸⁶⁷ One might also accept valid criticisms of the architectural space of the worship hall and its less than skillful design, as well as of the order and the course of the worship service itself.⁸⁶⁸ Of course, the reasons for that may not be simply an insistence on simplicity, but, as has been noted previously, the general level of education as well as low level of theological training of ministers that was a consequence of the discrimination endured by the evangelicals during the Soviet times.

It is important therefore to continue clarifying the nature of “gospel simplicity.” At this point, insights from other Christian traditions can be of help. Simplicity should not be “confused with baldness, negligence of forms or a docetic impatience with regard to forms... It is rather a matter of concentration, a determination to base worship on the central issues.”⁸⁶⁹

⁸⁶¹ M.V. Lomonosov, G.R. Derzhavin, N.M. Karamzin, I.A. Krylov, V.A. Zhukovsky, A.S. Pushkin, K.F. Ryleyev, A.I. Polezhayev, F.I. Tyutchev, M.Y. Lermontov, I. Nikitin, S. Nadson, K. L’dov, D. Merezhkovsky, O. Mandelstam, A. Akhmatova, M. Voloshin, Y. Yevtushenko.

⁸⁶² I.S. Prokhanov, Y. Pushkov, L. Boleslavsky, Y. Buzinny, V. Kushnir, A. Savchenko, R. Beryozov, A. Lukashin, and others. Special collections of poems on Christian themes written by famous poets of the 18th–20th centuries are available, as well as anthologies of Christian poets. Manuscript collections are also used.

⁸⁶³ See an interesting analysis in this field by Vladimir Nesteruk, *Khristianstvo i estetika*, Diplomnaya rabota [Christianity and Aesthetics, Diploma Thesis] (Minskaya bogoslovskaya seminariya, 2003, Unpublished).

⁸⁶⁴ L.N. Mitrokhin and E.Y. Lyagushina, *Nekotoryye cherty sovremennogo baptizma* [Some Features of the Modern Baptists], *Voprosy filosofii* [Questions of Philosophy] no. 2 (1964): 65.

⁸⁶⁵ The poetic value of the first poem (the author is unknown) is indeed poor but the second one (presumably written by Prokhanov) arguably has a deep meaning and harmony. These words have been put to music. See *Pesn’ Vosrozhdeniya 2500. Sbornik dukhovnykh gimnov i pesen evangel’skih tserkvey* [The Song of Revival 2500. Collection of hymns and songs of evangelical churches] (Moskva: Mezkhkonnfessional’nyy khristianskiy tsentr, 2001), no. 937.

⁸⁶⁶ QM, 2008. Members in a church in Orsha have complained that the main idea of the sermon is not always clear, that a sermon is merely a paraphrase of the Scripture they have read, that there is insufficient or poor preparation of the sermon, lack of contact with the audience, dull presentation, and sermons which frequently are too long. (Marat Nursultanov, A poll among the members of the Baptist church in Orsha, Vitebsk region [March 2008]. Available through the author.)

⁸⁶⁷ Personal visit of the author to the church service, 7 January 2009 (Personal notes, p. 51.)

⁸⁶⁸ Nesteruk, *Khristianstvo i estetika*.

⁸⁶⁹ Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, p. 102.

The *Sacrosanctum Concilium* uses the helpful expression of “a noble simplicity.” According to the authors the rites “should be short, clear, and unencumbered by useless repetitions; they should be within the people's powers of comprehensions, and normally should not require much explanation.”⁸⁷⁰ True simplicity requires conciseness, accuracy, careful selection of words or gestures, and takes into account the degree of perception, education, and preparedness of the audience and other participants. Such simplicity may involve serious preparation for the sermon (including its outline), for prayer (reflection on content), as well as teamwork in preparing for the worship, and evaluation of participants' reaction and feedback.

Of course, the worship format and contents, to a considerable degree, can also reflect the abilities, experience and knowledge of the person conducting the worship. They could also be shaped by the participants' tastes, preferences, and wishes.⁸⁷¹ If theological reflection on worship forms and traditions is rejected, and/or there are few materials available at the minister's disposal, then much may depend on the minister's resourcefulness, quick wit, and the level of biblical and theological education as he attempts to lead worship in an appropriate, effective and contextual manner.⁸⁷²

In this regard, evangelical simplicity needs to be freed from being presented in contrast to the quality of education of the main shapers of the worship service, particularly the minister.⁸⁷³ The level of theological education in Belarus still lags behind the secular educational standards. One of the reasons is the young age of the theological schools themselves and a rather limited development of Russian-speaking Baptist theological thought. As a result, the level of education of the pastors can be lower than that of the church members and guests. Yet an appreciation of theological resources for worship and ecclesiastical heritage would significantly enrich the genuine ‘gospel simplicity’ of traditional Baptist worship. Whilst modern worship styles are frequently presented as an alternative to the traditional worship service, understanding the

⁸⁷⁰ Ch. 1.3.34. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* is one of the constitutions of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). It was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 1963 and can be found at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html, last accessed 6 November 2019.

⁸⁷¹ Perhaps one can use the term “bricolage” to describe such a ritual, activated and actualised “in a specific local and temporal context”, and taking “a particular, more or less random, shape.” (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, p. 4.)

⁸⁷² Aidan Kavanaugh speaks of this role of the leader under the heading of “consumer mentality, supply and demand: the latest gimmicks for a bored and jaded people”, in his article “Liturgical Needs for Today and Tomorrow”, *Worship*, vol. 43, no. 8 (January 1969), p. 493.

Some experienced Russian-speaking Baptist ministers have published a few textbooks, including sections on worship, but these books are not widely used, and personal experience as well as oral tradition still dominate in the practice of worship in comparison to the transfer of experience and accumulated knowledge. E.g. see Kolesnikov, *Khristianin! Znaesh li ty kak dolzhno postupat' v dome Bozhiem?*; V. Matviiv, *Svyashchennodii pastora* [Pastor's Sacred Rites] (Kiiv: Vseukraïns'kyi Soyuz ob'ednan' evangel's'kykh khrystyian-baptystiv, 2004); Khrapov, *Dom Bozhii i sluzhenie v nem*. The first edition of the latter was prepared as *samizdat* in 1972-1974 and was not in widely available.

⁸⁷³ Leahu, “K voprosu o vzaimodeistvii teologii bogoslužheniya i teologii kul'tury...,” p. 46.

richness of the Christian tradition would open avenues for more contextual development of the practice of worship in Belarusian Baptist churches. The use of some form of a lectionary, for example, would prevent a pastor from preaching only their favorite themes and rescue the church from their personal preferences.⁸⁷⁴ Improving general education and cultural conversance of the pastor would allow expressing simplicity and sincerity of faith at the appropriate literary and aesthetical level.⁸⁷⁵

Finally, it is also essential to develop a contextual traditional Baptist theology of worship, which is practically non-existent in Russian-speaking evangelical churches, and evaluate, from the Baptist standpoint, an ancient principle *lex orandi lex credendi*.⁸⁷⁶ It would require paying greater attention to the relationship between public worship and faith in order to understand how “the liturgical holds the ethical and the aesthetic together,”⁸⁷⁷ how the spiritual is embodied in the material, how worship and space, theology and time, worship service and art, worship and life are related to each other. As a result of such theological work, traditional Baptist worship could offer “a wonderful combination of simplicity and dignity in its form.”⁸⁷⁸

Part Two has sought to analyse in depth the form, content, space and emphases of traditional Baptist worship in Belarus against the background of the historical, socio-political and religious backgrounds (as discussed in Part One) in order to bring to light the intimate connections between the two and demonstrate that any theology of Baptist worship needs to seriously consider the way the wider context in which that worship happens influences its formation and values. The intention of the thesis in making such an examination of traditional forms of Baptist worship in Belarus is to seek a way whereby in facing the challenges of changing circumstances and situations, such traditional worship may still make a significant contribution to the ways in which public worship can continue to develop contextually, keeping its emphases as well as its Baptist identity. It is to this issue that Part Three now turns.

⁸⁷⁴ Timothy C.J. Quill, “Liturgical Worship,” in, ed., *Perspectives on Christian Worship, 5 Views*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Nashville: Broadman&Holman Publishers, 2009), p. 40.

⁸⁷⁵ Quality also depends on church members, who do not always have corresponding gifts and training for their involvement in ministry. Taking preparation seriously as well as adopting a certain degree of “liturgy,” without encroaching on the aspect of freedom, could protect worship from the church members who do not have a clear biblical understanding of worship and are guided by their preferences, suggesting a change or wish to participate in the service without having the ability to back up that desire. (Quill, p. 40.)

⁸⁷⁶ “The law of praying [is] the law of believing,” abbreviated form of Latin *Ut legem credendi lex statuat supplican*, the expression ascribed to Prosper of Aquitaine (390-455), a disciple of Augustin of Hippo. See Kevin Irwin, “Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi – Origins and Meaning: State of the Question,” *Liturgical Ministry*, 11 (Spring 2002): 57-69.

⁸⁷⁷ Catherine Pickstock, “Liturgy and Modernity,” *Telos*, no. 113 (Fall 1998): 24.

⁸⁷⁸ Motorin, “O bogosluzhenii v dni apostolov i v nashi dni,” p. 8.

PART III. TENSIONS IN WORSHIP

CHAPTER 7. IDENTIFYING TENSIONS IN PUBLIC WORSHIP

Belarusian Baptists originated at the juncture of the West and East, in a climate of persecution by the state and conflict with the dominant religious tradition represented by the Orthodox Church. The variety of historical links and contexts, in turn, resulted in a unique set of characteristics. However, due to the radical changes in social life after communism, Belarusian Baptist churches are still uncertain of their identity, and this theological uncertainty manifests itself in tensions present in the practice of worship.

The notion of tensions might be illustrated by the example of public prayer. The *ad hoc* nature of such prayer is associated with the free nature of traditional Baptist worship, yet it raises both theological and practical questions. It is a collision point of the principle of universal priesthood and the principle of church edification. Everybody can pray, but not every prayer edifies the church. The communal and the personal aspects in public worship are also in conflict here. Personal interests or needs expressed in prayer may be not in line with the general tone of the worship and one member of the church may be given much more public attention than others regardless of their real needs. There are also questions in terms of freedom and the formal organization of public worship. Inspiration and the desires of individual church members expressed in overlong prayers can clash with the topic of worship and time management if this time was meant to be used for other components of worship.

It should be acknowledged that, to some extent, tensions are naturally an integral part of the practice of worship, arising out of the dual citizenship and nature (physical and spiritual) of those who worship; their “true life is neither that of heaven nor of earth exclusively, but of both compounded.”⁸⁷⁹ In fact, Christian life can be described in terms of contradictions, collisions, and tensions between the analytical and intuitive ways of knowing God, the active and devotional approach to ministry, the objective and subjective understanding of conversion, the intellectual and emotional expression of faith, and so on.

This chapter reviews some of the tensions which characterize traditional worship: namely, the tensions between freedom and forms expressed in the structure and content of worship; between the individual and communal aspects in worship; and between the sacred and secular perspectives of worship, that is, in its relation to the world and its culture. Evangelicals may wish to believe that their theology determines their worship,⁸⁸⁰ but the actual practice of

⁸⁷⁹ David G. Peck, *Living Worship* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1944), p. 21.

⁸⁸⁰ Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 18.

worship often preaches a different message and teaches a different theology. For those new to the faith especially, public worship becomes the primary teacher of theology.⁸⁸¹ They may know little about denominational theology, creeds, and confessions despite attempts to teach them the basics of faith before baptism.⁸⁸² So as “worship both *expresses* and *nurtures* certain values,”⁸⁸³ these values can be in conflict with official written or unwritten dogmas and doctrines of worship.

7.1. Freedom and forms in tension

7.1.1. Freedom in worship

In James White’s taxonomy, the Protestant church is divided into nine categories, represented in a chart from left-wing to right-wing in the following order: Quaker, Pentecostal, Frontier, Anabaptist, Puritan, Reformed, Methodist, Anglican, and Lutheran.⁸⁸⁴ Traditional Baptist worship in Belarus with its rejection of service books, potential for the introduction of new elements and the lack of set ritual and ceremony would represent the left-wing of the spectrum, between the Frontier and Puritan worship. Ellis uses the term “free worship” to describe evangelical gatherings, where he defines freedom as

the freedom of local congregations to order their own gatherings for worship; it is the freedom of spontaneity which is open to the extempore guidance of the Holy Spirit; and it is the freedom of a particular worshipping community to respond to the reading and preaching of scripture addressed to them as God’s living Word.⁸⁸⁵

“Concern for simplicity and freedom”⁸⁸⁶ has always been a “trademark” of Baptists. As McKibbens put it, “our Baptist tradition of freedom in worship is a valued part of the denomination’s heritage.”⁸⁸⁷ Prescribed forms and authentic worship are seen to be mutually exclusive.⁸⁸⁸ Because “The Spirit blows where He wishes,”⁸⁸⁹ it would then be wrong to limit its

⁸⁸¹ Thus Maria Cornou wisely assumes “that the relationship between theology and worship is reciprocal” and worship “both shapes and expresses the theology of a particular community or congregation.” (Maria Eugenia Cornou, “Worship as a Formative Practice: The Worship Practices of Methodists, Baptists, and Free Brethren in Emerging Protestantism in Argentina (1867-1930)” (PhD diss., Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2016), p. 24.)

⁸⁸² Cf. C. Randall Bradley, “Congregational Song as Shaper of Theology: A Contemporary Assessment,” *Review and Expositor*, 100, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 357-358.

⁸⁸³ Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 98.

⁸⁸⁴ White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*, pp. 21-24. Cf. Melanie Ross, “Lefts and Rites: One Evangelical’s Perspective,” *Liturgy*, vol. 23, no. 1 (Jan.-March 2008): 36.

⁸⁸⁵ Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 27.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁸⁸⁷ McKibbens, “Our Baptist Heritage in Worship,” p. 67.

⁸⁸⁸ Cf. Prokhanov, *V kotle Rossii*, p. 20; Rogozin, *Otkuda vse eto poyavilos’?* p. 145; Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptizm i baptisty*, p. 17.

⁸⁸⁹ John 3:8, literal translation from Russian Synodal Bible.

actions by certain formulae. With an allusion to the Orthodox Church, where liturgy is the center of church life,⁸⁹⁰ Baptists would conversely say, “Evangelical Christians-Baptists have neither rituals nor liturgy.”⁸⁹¹ The suspicion of “ceremonial overgrowth,”⁸⁹² forms and rituals, which were associated with traditions of the “Established Church,” only strengthens the anti-liturgical frame of mind.⁸⁹³

Historical circumstances have also not been conducive to the development and preservation of ceremonies and rituals. Persecutions, shortages and restrictions on worship spaces, limited opportunities for the written transfer of tradition and until recently practically no theological literature about worship have left a deep mark. For a long time, apart from Eastern Orthodoxy, there was no other models of appropriate forms of worship which could be adapted.

As with the wider Baptist tradition, Belarusian Baptists pay particular attention to the spirit and mood of worship, or, in the words of Ellis, “the sincerity of the worshippers rather than when particular parts of worship [take] place.”⁸⁹⁴ The “Principles of Christian Life” in the 2003 “Doctrine of Faith of Evangelical Christian Baptists in Belarus” establishes the following principles:

12.4.3. Public Worship in a House of Prayer should be done in atmosphere of reverential worship in spirit and in truth, and in holiness and purity (*Ps. 5:7; Ps. 33:8; Ps. 111:10; Ps. 119:38; Prov. 22:4; Is. 30:15; Neh. 1:11; Eccl. 8:11-13; Mal. 1:6; 4:2; Acts 9:31; John 4:23, 24; 2 Cor. 5:11; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:21; Phil. 2:12; Heb. 5:7; Heb. 12:22-28*).

⁸⁹⁰ “An Orthodox is ‘*homo liturgical*’” according to Tatiana Goricheva, “Freid i *homo liturgikas*” [Freud And The ‘*homo liturgikas*’], *Phoma* [Thomas], (February 2010): 77.

⁸⁹¹ Words such as “liturgy” and “liturgical” may have various meanings and describe worship of a congregation in its entirety or refer to the interrelation and implication of components in worship. Alexander Schmemmann, an Orthodox liturgist, attempted a broad definition, fighting against the reduction of the term (Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, p. 25). Schmemmann’s definition is in unison with a common understanding among theologians of the word “liturgy” when they examine it from an etymological perspective: “In the singular the word ‘liturgy’ denotes an act of worship, more specifically the Eucharist. Derived from the Greek *leitourgia*, it was used in Hellenistic Greek of an act of public service. In the New Testament it is employed of an act of service or ministry.” (Davies, *A Dictionary of Liturgy & Worship*, p. 222.) However, the term “liturgy” also has a narrower meaning, relating mainly to the words used in a service, which is why Paul Basden speaks about “liturgical churches,” which include the Russian Orthodox Church. (Paul Basden, *The Worship Maze: Finding a Style to Fit Your Church* (Downer Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), pp. 36, 54.) In the Orthodox liturgy, true meaning is revealed in the proportion, fullness, order and relations of elements. As Gordon Lathrop points out, “Meaning occurs through structure, by one thing set against another” (Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993], p. 33). If, then, the understanding of “liturgy” is narrowed to a certain developed form of worship with a fixed structure and invariable content, primarily but not limited to the ordered commission of the Lord’s Supper, traditional services in ECB churches in Belarus would not be considered liturgical. Secondly, despite the fact that there are some familiar traditions of holding worship and common elements for the service, there are no officially approved or required forms in regard to worship, with no such decisions adopted either at church level, or at the level of a council of churches in Belarus. And thirdly, no theological meaning would be attached (at least explicitly) to the relationship and sequence of elements of worship. In that sense, ‘non-liturgical worship’ would be worship that is characterized by the absence of fixed forms in which the relationship and sequence of the elements has theological meaning.

⁸⁹² P. Franklin Chambers, “The Renaissance of Worship,” *The Baptist Quarterly*, vol. 2 (London: Baptist Union Publication Department, 1924-1925): 13.

⁸⁹³ In the Orthodox Church “all this lofty and beautiful liturgical life is regulated by very stiff and clear regulations” (Krasovitskaya, *Liturgica*, p. 9.)

⁸⁹⁴ Christopher J. Ellis, “Understanding Worship: Trends and Criteria” in *Currents in Baptist Theology of Worship Today*, ed. Jones and Parushev, p. 36.

12.4.4. We understand that music ministry and singing in church should be spiritual, edifying and aim at glorifying the Lord, without contradiction to the spirit of the Scriptures, without bringing a spirit of this world, worldly manner of performance and dancing (*Ps. 47:6, 7; Ps. 67:1; 1 Cor. 10:7; 1 Cor. 14:33; Eph. 5:19, 20; Col. 3:16; Rev. 18:21, 22*).⁸⁹⁵

The foremost, and most obvious feature is the absence of a strict and explicit plan or prepared content for public worship. In traditional Belarusian Baptist worship, the program of the service exists only in the mind of the pastor, and often during the sermon he decides which song the congregation will be singing next. The way of taking the offering, making announcements, and giving greetings can be arranged in an entirely new format if the service is directed by another minister. Quite often the issue of someone's involvement in the worship are addressed during the course of the service. In the middle of the service a person may send a note to the pastor volunteering to recite a poem or sing a hymn. In small churches the worship service leader may ask, "Who else is ready to take part in the meeting/praise the Lord?" Or they may encourage people to sing, share a testimony, and recite poetry inviting the ones "who are led by the Lord." A pastor also may invite the church members to participate by a slight nod or gesture.⁸⁹⁶ Few pastors in Belarus are full-time and they do not have enough time, or intellectual and financial resources to plan and prepare for worship gatherings as an essential part of their responsibilities. There are few resources or guides in the Russian language, and many pastors lack finances and equipment to print new programs every Sunday. It is less complicated and expensive to rely on members' spontaneous inspiration during the time of worship.

The most popular pattern for public worship preparation is as follows: sermons are planned a month,⁸⁹⁷ a week,⁸⁹⁸ two or three days before worship⁸⁹⁹ or right before worship.⁹⁰⁰ In some churches the music element is usually planned and prepared three to four days in

⁸⁹⁵ *Verouchenie evangel'skikh khristian baptistov v Belarusi, prinyatoye na s'ezde EKhB v Belarusi 15.03.2003 goda.*

⁸⁹⁶ Nursultanov, A poll among the members of the Baptist church in Orsha. The same can be seen in other churches. For example, on 12 August 2012 in a worship service of the Russian-speaking church "Bethany" in Tallinn, Estonia, whose pastors along with some members are originally from Belarus, the pastor asked the musicians during the worship service: "What else can you sing?" "There is a song, but we will do it after the sermon," the musician responded. In the same meeting, while the congregation was singing, one guest was told that he must also preach the final sermon immediately after this song (Personal notes, p. 59.) In some churches or on special occasions such as Christmas or times of evangelism, written programs can be used but they usually represent a half-page general scheme. (Churches in Slutsk, Minsk region; "Golgotha" and "Light of Truth," Minsk; churches on Fortechaya 61/1 and Voolka, Brest; "Grace of God," Bobruisk, Mogilev region [Personal notes, p. 66].)

⁸⁹⁷ "Good News," Minsk; churches in Borovliany and Stolbtsy, Minsk region; church "Emmanuel" in Mogilev (SI, 2012; Q, 2013).

⁸⁹⁸ "Bible Church" in Borisov and church in Slutsk, Minsk region. Q, 2013.

⁸⁹⁹ Church in Zhdanovichy, Minsk region. Q, 2013.

⁹⁰⁰ The traditional practice in one of the churches in Polotsk, Vitebsk region ("Piety") at least till 2005, was that before the meeting, five to seven men who had "the gift of teaching," presented their messages and outlines of their sermons to the pastor. All of them should have their messages ready, but only two of them will actually be asked to preach. This practice is repeated the next Sunday, except that each man should have prepared a new message this time. (Personal notes, p. 65b.)

advance,⁹⁰¹ or the day before⁹⁰² (the choir schedule might be planned a quarter in advance).⁹⁰³ In the five to fifteen minutes before the worship service begins the brothers define the order of sermons, the order of guests and involvement of musicians. During public worship the church members can suggest reciting poetry, singing or sharing their testimony if they feel led to it. In “House of Gospel,” Vitebsk the leaders define a general pattern on the basis of preaching and singing; the information about the participants is collected right before the worship starts in Slutsk, Minsk region and they print out a schedule on the spot.⁹⁰⁴

Still, spiritual preparation of mind and heart plays a significant role and includes prayer, reading, and fasting, especially before the Lord’s Supper. In many churches, on entering the sanctuary, church members kneel to pray, after which they greet each other saying, “Peace be with you.” As soon as the ones able to lead the singing arrive, the congregation starts singing hymns even without waiting for the formal beginning of the worship service, preparing themselves to participate in it.⁹⁰⁵ In some other churches, members read Christian articles and sermons before service starts in order to lead the congregation away from worldly thoughts and conversations.⁹⁰⁶ An author of an article in *Bratskiy Vestnik* recommended that, “Coming into the house of prayer, let us take our seat quietly, so that we may not break the silence, and let us read the Word of God or pray silently before the service.”⁹⁰⁷ So in the best cases the lack of planning is not a negligence of worship but the expression of the understanding of the inspiration and activity of the Holy Spirit.

Aspiration for freedom is also reflected in the preaching. The absence of planning in preaching was almost universally practiced until the turn of the millenium. Out of the fourteen churches covered in the reaearch questionnaires⁹⁰⁸ eight, primarily small and middle-sized, do not have a sermon schedule. Preachers would be appointed by pastors before the service or some brothers, “inspired by Spirit,” may just volunteer to preach. Moreover, even in the middle of the service a brother from the congregation could be called out to do “the ministry of the word.”

⁹⁰¹ SI, 2012; Q, 2013.

⁹⁰² Central Baptist church in Gomel. Q, 2013.

⁹⁰³ Church in Voolka, Brest. Q, 2013.

⁹⁰⁴ Personal notes, pp. 65b-66; SI, 2012. It is important to observe that, in spite of seemingly neglecting planning, believers have very high view of worship and the strict requirements concerning attending worship which they respect very much. One of the key characteristics of traditional public worship in Belarus is “awe,” “deep concentrated worship of a human soul to God while contemplating by faith His majesty, His power, holiness and love for a human being.” (Shchavelin, “O blagogovenii v dome molitvy,” p. 41.) This characteristic is accompanied by humility, which expresses itself in restrained behavior in a house of prayer, a strict dress code, and kneeling. (Gnida, “Poryadok provedeniya bogoslužheniy v tserkvakh evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov,” p. 72.)

⁹⁰⁵ Rechitsa, Svyatopolka, Brest region; Kopyl’, Minsk region; “Grace of God,” Bobruisk, Mogilev region. In the church in Luninets, Brest region, they turn on classical music ten minutes before worship starts. (Personal visits of the author to the church services [Personal notes, p. 50].)

⁹⁰⁶ “Emmanuel,” Mogilev, 2008. Until 2005 “Light of Gospel” church had had a similar practice. In Church “Golgotha,” Minsk in the evening they read articles from *Bratskiy Vestnik*. (Personal notes, p. 50.)

⁹⁰⁷ Shchavelin, “O blagogovenii v dome molitvy,” p. 42

⁹⁰⁸ Q, 2008.

This would be especially true when the congregation had the privilege of having a welcome guest in attendance such as a preacher or a minister from another church.⁹⁰⁹

Large churches began to change this practice of scheduling in 2000, usually preparing a schedule for a month ahead.⁹¹⁰ Some of these large churches have fifteen to twenty preachers available, so scheduling helps to order worship. The sermon schedule has already found wide use among younger preachers who are strong supporters of greater preparation before delivering a sermon. In fact, this approach is not new within the Russian-speaking Baptist tradition. AUCECB leaders back in 1988 supported the idea that it is good to inform a preacher of the time when he is going to speak so that he may have time to prepare a biblical message and meditate over God's Word.⁹¹¹ The understanding here was that a sermon should be not only inspirational, but also well-prepared. However, such practice does not go unchallenged even today. For example, in January 2013 the senior pastor in "Light of Gospel," Minsk initiated the discussion about canceling the schedule of sermons. Most preachers were not so enthusiastic about the idea, but later in 2014 the practice of planning was cancelled and preachers have since been appointed right before worship. In 2012 the schedule was cancelled in Slutsk, Minsk region, too.⁹¹² The reasons expressed were the fear of limiting the Holy Spirit and depriving worship of its authenticity and sincerity. It is still expected that being filled by the Spirit, which is especially important for a sermon, is characterized by spontaneity, ingenuity and unpredictability (cf. Acts 2:4; 4:31; 1 Cor. 14:29-30), and planning sets limits for God's work in worship. The opponents of the schedule also suppose that the obligation to preach (according to the schedule) could conflict with a spiritual condition of a person (lack of inspiration) at the moment and the preacher would not therefore have the appropriate influence.⁹¹³

Prayers in churches are examples of what may be called "free" or "extempore" prayer, in which spontaneously articulated prayers are offered by one person, or several persons, on the

⁹⁰⁹ In church "Gethsemane" in Machulishchi, Minsk region the pastor asks before worship begins: "Who is ready to preach the first sermon?" (The second sermon has been reserved for the guest preacher). The brothers give a shy and uncertain response. The pastor's question is more a formality. In reality he is ready to preach himself and he only wants to be respectful of other preachers. (Personal visit of the author to the church service, 12 May 2013 [Personal notes, p. 65b].) In the church in Rubel', Brest region, the pastor gives notice to the preachers two to five days ahead. Sometimes the issue is solved right before worship. Somebody is ready and somebody is not but when the church has twelve preachers, at least three of them, including the pastor, are always ready to preach (or more or less ready). (Anatoliy Filanovich, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 18 January 2016 [Personal notes, p. 66].)

⁹¹⁰ "Light of Gospel," "Golgotha," "Bethlehem," Minsk; central Baptist church in Kobrin, church on Fortechynaya 61/1, Brest; church in Luninets, Brest region; "Grace of God," Bobruisk, Mogilev region; "House of the Gospel," Vitebsk (for two-three months ahead). At "Light of Truth" the issue of sermon topics is determined two to three months ahead of time and they make a decision about singing just before worship. (SI, 2012; Q, 2013.)

⁹¹¹ Gnida, "Poryadok provedeniya bogoslužheniy v tserkvakh evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov," p. 72. When I preached in Moscow central Baptist church (1993-1997), the senior pastor usually called me three to four days before the occasion to let me know that I should be preaching, and that as the preacher, I was to determine the topic.

⁹¹² Personal visit of the author to "Light of Gospel" church service, Minsk, 31 August 2014; Gennadiy Ralko, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 11 February 2014 (Personal notes, p. 65.)

⁹¹³ Pavel Obrovets, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 17 February 2015 (Personal notes, p. 65.)

behalf of the congregation,⁹¹⁴ or, as they are often called, prayers “using your own words,” prayers which express unfeigned feelings, from the bottom of the heart.⁹¹⁵ The idea of composing prayers in advance is foreign to the Baptists in Belarus, primarily due to the negative reaction to the ritualistic liturgy of Orthodoxy, along with the desire to preserve their Baptist identity and keep prayer as a real-life conversation or communication with God.⁹¹⁶

Some theologians from other traditions, like Evelyn Underhill, an English Anglo-Catholic writer, would also advocate freedom, spontaneity and enthusiasm in worship, as a protest against formality, routine and as an expression of the manifestation of the Spirit.⁹¹⁷ In the context of traditional Baptist worship this is expressed in flexibility, encouragement, greater involvement, and the possibility of spontaneous participation. This way, the invisible Holy Spirit manifests Himself through believers for the benefit of members in various spiritual gifts, and first of all, gifts of speaking.⁹¹⁸

In practice this approach, which could be identified as “the Cult of Spontaneity,” can result in a number of problems, like unsystematic teaching.⁹¹⁹ Indeed, as William Abernethy, who served in Congregational churches in the United States, has observed, “The content of a service which emphasizes spirit over order is often shaped [. . .] not so much by the full biblical story as by our own experience.”⁹²⁰ This proves to be often the case because the topics of the sermons are determined by the interests of the preacher and not by the church calendar, or by the Bible text, or by the needs of the congregation. Russian researcher, Seventh Day Adventist Viktor Leahu, warns that

in the absence of the latter [a planned and prepared order of worship], the Church may come under the power of destructive forces, and, particularly pantophagy [the assimilation of elements of different traditions of worship, as well as elements of secular culture] and arbitrary rule of taste.⁹²¹

⁹¹⁴ Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 104.

⁹¹⁵ Gnida, “Poryadok provedeniya bogoslužheniy v tserkvakh evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov,” p. 72.

⁹¹⁶ Arguments against written prayers and a focus on prayer “from the heart,” “living prayer,” remind us of arguments brought forward by Congregationalists in England against the set, formal, structured prayers established in the Book of Common Prayer. Objections included the following:

A written prayer deprives a person of their own ideas and words.

Set forms cannot meet various needs in specific congregations.

Set forms become too familiar and lead to the loss of interest in worship.

Set prayers hinder people to draw near to God the Father. (Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old & New: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], p. 115.)

⁹¹⁷ Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (New York: Harper&Row, 1936), pp. 87-90.

⁹¹⁸ 1 Cor. 12:7-12

⁹¹⁹ Some preachers do not follow the generally accepted custom to keep to the topic when churches celebrate the Lord’s Supper or some Christian holidays. For example, March 28, 2010 on Palm Sunday at “Bethlehem” Church in Minsk, during evening worship the first preacher neither mentioned how Jesus entered Jerusalem nor the meaning of the celebration, but preached, instead, about ethical issues of Christian life. February 5, 2012, before the Lord’s Supper, a preacher at Borovliany spent his time exposing evolutionary theory and paid no attention to the suffering and death of Christ. (Personal visits of the author to the church services [Personal notes, p. 65].)

⁹²⁰ William Beaven Abernethy, *A New Look for Sunday Morning* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1975), p. 53.

⁹²¹ Leahu, “K voprosu o vzaimodeistvii teologii bogoslužheniya i teologii kul’tury...,” p. 46.

Paradoxically, unpreparedness may result in less flexibility and variety in worship⁹²² but planning may schedule more components, involve more people, and make worship more diverse and meaningful.

Lack of planning may also result in a low quality of elements and of the worship as a whole, and it may even lead to disorder. As a result of the emphasis on spontaneity, some people who like to preach, teach, or sing but have no gift to do so may take a large part in worship; some components such as a very long poem or a “prayer-sermon” may not be appropriate, or the content of some components may simply be irrelevant. Amateurish singing and unprepared preaching may increase a congregation’s discontent.⁹²³ Such lack of preparation may also result in a sense of disorder if musicians become distracted by searching for songs or tuning their instruments, and there may be tedious pauses between the components, which lessens the sense of awe.⁹²⁴ The results from the research questionnaires lists failure of amplifiers, projectors, sound-tracks, faults of stage arrangement, and poor attempts to fix the microphones during public worship among the problems.⁹²⁵ With a heavy heart, church members acknowledge that such lack of preparation and poor organization has a negative effect on the reputation of their church. Church members may feel embarrassed if unbelievers are present at the meeting.⁹²⁶ It is not surprising, therefore, that church members report more interest in organization than in unplanned freedom, or in other words that they prefer organized freedom,⁹²⁷ knowing that freedom in worship may bring both blessings and problems. Freedom in worship therefore must be handled wisely and must be balanced with planning and preparation in terms of both the structure and the components of worship.

7.1.2. Forms in worship

Worship in Baptist Churches is distinguished not only by freedom but also by certain structures and forms which are repeated Sunday by Sunday. In fact, any repeated activities take on a kind of form, which also becomes repeated, especially when these activities are practiced in some churches three times a week and about two hundred times a year. Thus, in Belarusian churches some invariable forms—“the ritual of non-ritualistic churches”⁹²⁸—have gradually developed: a traditional structure of worship, established formulae for the Lords’ Supper, the

⁹²² Cf. F Franklin M. Segler, *Christian Worship, Its Theology and Practice* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), p. 180. Segler, a Baptist theologian, says that when Baptists “do not plan some order or ritual, they usually drift into a rut which they follow as slavishly as the more liturgical churches follow their liturgies.”

⁹²³ QM, 2008.

⁹²⁴ SI, 2012.

⁹²⁵ Q, 2013.

⁹²⁶ Ibid.

⁹²⁷ QM, 2008.

⁹²⁸ Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship*, p. 217.

methods of receiving the offering, the prayer of blessing and dismissal when the meeting ends, and so on. It is not surprising, then, that secular Belarusian sociologists noted in 1969 that Baptists observe “strict regulation, a certain system of actions at prayer services, and obeying rituals” and, on this basis, claimed that “Baptists also has its cult.”⁹²⁹ Thus we speak of “non-ritualist churches” tentatively; the issue is not the presence of forms but rather the meaning and role that they play in worship.

Forms or some structures are essential for the survival, retention, and transition of meaningful customs of a group of people. In the opinion of theologian and Methodist minister Paul Hoon, “This helps maintain and communicate the content of worship to other people and generations.”⁹³⁰ Forms or traditions as such are valuable carriers of information that is memorized by the participants of worship due to regular repetition. Geographical dispersion and the number of believers who have experienced these repeated forms allows information to be saved when any written documents might be destroyed or do not exist.

Forms also help (new) ministers to lead worship as they have some ready and time-tested forms. Without some inherited forms leaders or groups invent them anew every Sunday, and experiments of this kind are usually distractive as people are unable to concentrate on content when they are busy with negotiating forms. The authors of AUCECB’s *Presbyters’ Handbook* warn: “As far as church members get used to the set order of worship and church statutes, any deviations may cause distress.”⁹³¹

Furthermore, and this is much highly appreciated by Belarusian Baptists, forms control and bring order to the energy of freedom. Baptists often repeat that “God is not a God of confusion but of peace,”⁹³² and that God’s nature calls us to order in worship which means some structure, discipline, and form.⁹³³ This issue was vital in terms of past relationships with the Pentecostal church.⁹³⁴ To avoid some extremes such as uncontrolled prophecies, speaking in tongues or outcries, “the Spirit-emphasis...was marginalised during the decades after the [Second World] war.”⁹³⁵

⁹²⁹ Lensu and Prokshina, *Baptizm i Baptisty*, p. 76. They add that “Baptist ceremonies are cleansed from clearly magical acts which are so characteristic of Eastern Orthodoxy or Roman Catholicism” (Ibid., p. 77.)

⁹³⁰ Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship*, p. 216.

⁹³¹ *Nastol’naya kniga presvitera*, 2d. edn. [The Pastor’s Handbook] (Moskva: Vsesoyuznyy sovet evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov, 1987), p. 76.

⁹³² 1 Cor. 14:33.

⁹³³ SI, 2012.

⁹³⁴ Pentecostals were part of AUCECB from 1945 to 1989. See section 1.1.

⁹³⁵ Pilli, “Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Estonia: The Shaping of Identity, 1945-1991,” p. 163. The Pentecostals were forcibly united with AUCECB in 1945 and they formed their own Union in 1989. Thus, they are really part of the same worship tradition. (See section 1.1.) Cf. the situation in England. Thomas McKibbens notices that an event took place in England in 1647 “which nudged Baptist worship toward a more structured and formalized practice. It was in that year that George Fox found the ‘inward light,’ and a few Baptists were among the first to join the Quaker movement. Fox’s emphasis on the ‘inner light’ seemed to many Baptists to cross the line from order to chaos.” (McKibbens, “Our Baptist Heritage in Worship,” p. 56.)

In addition, through public worship, Baptists tried to express their denominational affiliation and their understanding of faith, which influenced the leading role of the sermon and the place of common singing. The Baptist movement needed new forms to distinguish itself and consolidate its followers. Among such forms one can list the traditions which regulate yearly, monthly and weekly cycles of worship.⁹³⁶ In fact this commitment to differences in personal devotion, public worship, and interchurch relations helped Baptists to survive and spread their beliefs better than the unorganized and unstructured Molokans and Stundists, many of whom joined the Baptists or were absorbed by them.

The above suggests that forms which have developed over time in Baptist worship are important in the passing on of tradition, in preventing confusion in worship, and in keeping the identity of a particular religious group. On the other hand, forms, or a rigid attitude toward forms, can act to hinder the expression of gifts, limit the sense of freedom in Christ and not be sensitive enough to the flow of the Spirit if these limit the freedom in Christ and quench the Spirit and the expression of gifts. Forms also may be irrelevant in particular situations and contexts and may prevent the adaptation of better forms from other traditions. “Sanctified by time” forms, which are difficult to change, can damage worship. Thus, as in the case of freedom, balance is needed to allow real blessing from worship to emerge. As William Abernethy concluded:

Spirit then is related to the vitality of worship, yet too much raw spirit can lead to chaos or unwanted excesses. Some order is necessary to channel that spirit in beneficial ways. Yet too much order can be a problem, too, in that such order can stifle living spirit and lead to rigid, cold, and unfeeling worship.⁹³⁷

This evaluation could be a good description of worship in Belarus, where the balance is tilted to one side. As worship inevitably uses some forms, regulations, and schemes, there is some tension between form and freedom, order and spirit, “structure and liberty,”⁹³⁸ between “freedom and tradition, spontaneity and order, the extempore and the liturgical, the charismatic and the formal, the prophetic and the sacramental.”⁹³⁹ Like Scylla and Charybdis we seem to be either waylaid with lifeless ritual or with destructive freedom, “unstructured spontaneity that creates bedlam,” or “a well-regulated order of worship that often creates boredom.”⁹⁴⁰

The churches enjoy the fruit of freedom in Spirit in worship but at the same time they suffer from poor organization and superficiality, which is often an end result of aspiration for

⁹³⁶ Y.I. Zhidkov, “Nashi prazdniki” [Our Festivals], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 2 (1946): 13-20.

⁹³⁷ Abernethy, *A New Look for Sunday Morning*, p. 48.

⁹³⁸ Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life*, p. 114.

⁹³⁹ Segler, *Christian Worship, Its Theology and Practice*, p. 178.

⁹⁴⁰ Kenneth L. Chafin, *1, 2 Corinthians. The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco: Word Book Publishers, 1985), p. 173.

freedom. They might enjoy order in worship, yet also suffer from formality and coldness, which is often an end result of aspiration for structure and arrangement. Aware of that, Baptists are looking for ways to reconcile spirit and order in worship. The search is not always successful and the church members come each time for public worship in hope that freedom will build and edify, the forms will serve a real freedom, and the combination of order and spontaneity will lead them into God's presence and allow them to experience God's Spirit at work in their life.

7.2. The priesthood of all believers versus the corporate nature of worship

7.2.1. "Each one . . . has a revelation" (1 Cor. 14:26)

Tension between individual and communal aspects of worship, arising out of a particular understanding of the priesthood of all believers and their direct involvement in worship, is another feature of public worship. Quoting 1 Peter 2:9, Russian-speaking Baptists often talk about "the holy nation," "the priesthood of all believers," and specially stress this feature when talking about differences between Orthodox and Baptist beliefs and practices. Baptists emphasize that all believers are priests who have personal access to God through prayer and the Word of God.⁹⁴¹

The legacy of the Reformation and common Baptist roots may help explain this "emphasis on a personal faith experience" in worship.⁹⁴² But what is more important for Russian-speaking Baptists in their approach to the participation in worship, is the way they link it to their understanding of New Testament Christianity. Along with 1 Peter 2:9, they quote the Apostle Paul, who uses the term "everyone" and "all" when speaking about gifts (1 Cor. 12:7, 13; 14:26).⁹⁴³ As there was no separation between clergy and laity in the apostolic church and everyone could participate in some way, so, it is argued, should it be in a church that seeks to follow the New Testament Way.⁹⁴⁴

In fact, it can be argued that the responsibility and capacity of each soul, the priesthood of all believers, and the universal call to sanctity are the central truths governing worship.⁹⁴⁵ In the

⁹⁴¹ "Seven Baptist principles," website of the Union of ECB in Belarus, <http://baptist.by/principy-baptizma/>, last accessed 16 May 2019.

⁹⁴² Pilli, "Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Estonia: The Shaping of Identity, 1945-1991," p. 137.

⁹⁴³ Frank D. Rees, "The Worship of all believers," *The Baptist Quarterly* 41.3 (July, 2005): 176; Liesch, *People in the Presence of God*, p. 73.

⁹⁴⁴ In the Orthodox context, this teaching played a special role in the self-determination and preservation of Baptist identity. Apart from this, Baptists also question the practical side of Orthodox liturgy. They think that parishioners do not sufficiently understand Church Slavonic language and ceremonies and remain passive spectators rather than participants. Cf. the opinion of an Orthodox theologian in Briia, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, p. 23. This type of more passive involvement in conjunction with a lack of understanding leads to the estrangement between liturgy and life. In this situation any sense of application can be seen to be difficult or impossible.

⁹⁴⁵ Underhill, *Worship*, p. 299.

words of James and Susan White, participation “is [the] central [word] in our thinking about worship today.”⁹⁴⁶ Everyone has the opportunity to speak, not based on some vague egalitarian or democratic principles, but because everyone has been gifted and therefore has something to bring to the conversation.⁹⁴⁷ Historically the practice was not unique to Belarusian Baptists. Describing Baptist development in Poland, to which Western Belarus belonged from 1921 to 1939, Zbigniew Wierchowksi states that “everyone was encouraged to pray aloud [one by one] during the services.”⁹⁴⁸ Joining in the weekly worship is therefore essential in the Baptist practice of traditional worship, as Sunday should be devoted “to the Lord, Bible study, abiding in prayer and public worship involvement...”⁹⁴⁹

In worship practice the “priesthood of all believers” is manifested in a variety of participants: both “ministers” and congregation members take part in worship, and those who are not members of the church but attend worship services regularly such as children, youth and *priblizhionnye*.⁹⁵⁰ Unbelievers too may participate in public worship by singing with the congregation and participating in the offering.⁹⁵¹

Women dominate in many congregations in every aspect except preaching and leading public worship, where their participation is not allowed.⁹⁵² Poetry is recited almost exclusively by children and women in most churches; this, with singing, seems to be *sui generis* compensation for the ban on sisters’ preaching. Prayer services are generally considered to be predominantly women’s meetings. In special prayer services women usually outnumber men by a ratio of 3/1 or 4/3.⁹⁵³ Pastors make a strong call to men to join prayer services but the situation is changing slowly and men’s prayer groups in churches are more rarely observed than women’s prayer groups.⁹⁵⁴

⁹⁴⁶ James White and Susan White, *Church Architecture. Building and Renovating for Christian Worship*, p. 17.

⁹⁴⁷ Curtis W. Freeman, James Wm. McClendon, Jr., C. Rosalee Velloso da Silva, *Baptist Roots. A Reader in the Theology of a Christian People* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1999), p. 9.

⁹⁴⁸ Zbigniew Wierchowksi, “Between the Wars: Golden Years for Polish Baptists,” *Baptistic Theologies*, 1, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 89.

⁹⁴⁹ *Verouchenie evangel'skikh khristian baptistov v Belarusi, prinyatoe na s'ezde EKhB v Belarusi 15.03.2003 goda*. 9.3.

⁹⁵⁰ See footnote 615.

⁹⁵¹ Participation of unbaptized believers periodically provokes arguments in churches. But most of the time the sides agree that the unbaptized people and even children yet to make a decision can participate in public worship (except for preaching), especially if they come from Baptist homes, “for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matt. 19:14). As to “unbelieving” adults they should not participate in public worship individually or in groups in front of the congregation. But the practice may vary across churches. For example, in “House of the Gospel” in Vitebsk an unbaptized visitor does not have a right to recite poetry and the children could participate in public worship only under the leadership of their teacher. (Timofei Egorenkov, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 26 November 2015 [Personal notes, p. 68].)

⁹⁵² Cf. “Vzglyad nazad,” p. 7.

⁹⁵³ Q, 2008.

⁹⁵⁴ About women's role and involvement in the life of Baptist churches and unions of the European Baptist Federation see also the article by Lina Andronovienne and Keith Jones, “Women in Baptist life,” in *A Dictionary of the European Baptist Life and Thought*, ed. John Briggs, pp. 529-531.

The dominance of women in prayer and other public worship components is related first of all to the fact that they outnumber men in churches. In some communities, such as Lesovnya, Starye Terushki, Kopyl, Slutsk, Minsk region, women (mostly elderly) make up almost ninety per cent of believers,⁹⁵⁵ or even one hundred per cent,⁹⁵⁶ which is in turn explained by a higher degree of religious activity on the part of women in Belarus as well as a longer lifespan for women.⁹⁵⁷

Participation by many people in worship brings a dynamism and can create the feeling of informality and ease. Since this expresses the non-liturgical nature of worship, to a certain extent it leaves room for freedom of worship and a quick change of components helps the congregation engage with this long time of worship. A diversity of components enriches Baptist worship and adds some color to it. Poetry read by good reciters often produces an effect comparable to that of a good sermon. Testimonies bring realistic touch to Baptist religious experience and appeal not only to people's minds, but also to their feelings; they touch hearts, arouse emotions, and are powerful tools for witnessing to unbelievers because they make it easier for people to understand the way others have been drawn into God's saving activity.

As participants use their talents and gifts, which is especially true for singers, musicians,⁹⁵⁸ and poets, a sincere individual's worship encourages other people come into the presence of the Lord and it edifies them.

If a person who prays a public prayer, tells the Lord sincerely, with great passion about different requests and gives thanks to Him, these requests and thanksgiving are put on the hearts of all people in the congregation and their hearts begin to burn with the desire to pray about these things, also.⁹⁵⁹

⁹⁵⁵ Data for 2012 is as follows: up to 85% in Molodechnj, Minsk region; 70-80% in Liadno, Volozhin, Berezinskoe, Mar'ina Gorka, Machulishchi, Minsk region. 60-70% in Borovliany, Kolodishchi, Gatovo, Soligorsk, Shatsk, Minsk region; "Light of Truth," "Bethlehem," "Resurrection," Minsk. (Personal notes, p. 68b.) The data for 1979 shows that men made up to 20.4% of the membership in ECB churches of Vitebsk area and 36.5% in Brest area. (Baltrushevich, *Uzajemadachynienni dziarzhavy i pratestanckich cerkvau u BSSR u 1965-1985 hh.* [The Relations of State and Protestant churches in the Byelorussian SSR in 1965-1985], p. 227.)

⁹⁵⁶ In Ruzhany, Brest region, there are only women in the congregation and in order to have public worship and preaching they invite a brother in Christ from another church. (Valeriy Okhrimuk, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 27 November 2013 [Personal notes, p. 68b].) The situation was the same in a congregation in Liubiacha, Minsk region, until August 2013 when the church merged with the neighboring church in the village of Volok. (Ibid.)

⁹⁵⁷ Lina Andronoviene in her dissertation explores the position of women in the wider evangelical Post-Soviet context, expanding on the problem of singleness. "Transforming the Struggles of Tamars: Singleness in Intentional Baptist Communities" (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2012). She also addresses the subject of women in church ministry in *Involuntarily Free or Voluntarily Bound: Singleness in the Baptist Communities of Post-communist Europe*, IBTS Occasional Publications Series, vol. II (Prague, International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003). The book by N.A. Belyakova and M. Dobson, *Zhenshchiny v evangel'skikh obshchinakh poslevoyennogo SSSR. 1940-1980-ye gg. Issledovaniye i istochniki* is dedicated to the history of life of women in Baptist and Pentecostal churches, and their role in the community and family.

⁹⁵⁸ Zbigniew Wierchowski noted the importance of this practice in the 1920s, arguing that "Various types of singing and music forms such as orchestras, multiple choirs, soloists, and duets also make it possible to utilize the different talents of the believers." (Wierchowski, "Between the Wars: Golden Years for Polish Baptists," p. 97.)

⁹⁵⁹ V.S., "Voprosy dukhovnoy zhizni," p. 22.

The presumption is that meaningful and deep prayer or song teaches and instructs others, in the same way that prayers and songs recorded in the Scripture continue to teach believers.

Individual prayer allows every believer to express religious feelings and desires. In fact, an individual prayer may soon become a congregational prayer, as “Every worshipper has the duty to act as priest for his fellow worshippers.”⁹⁶⁰ If believers agree with the content of prayer, they often murmur words of assent, “Hear this prayer, Lord,” “Yes, Lord,” and a loud “Amen” after the end of the prayer.⁹⁶¹ In large gatherings Christians are usually not very personal in their prayers, and their words express the desires of many believers with some individual features.

Public worship involvement enables people to become aware of their importance and value in church. Pastors and Sunday school teachers therefore give children opportunities to sing or recite poems. Sometimes it is difficult to understand them, but their participation and joy are more important in this case than the problem of edification. If all are encouraged to bring themselves to the worship, then those who might otherwise see themselves, or be regarded by others as “those without strength”⁹⁶² find a place amongst the willingness of others to bear with their weaknesses.⁹⁶³

An exaggerated attention to individual participants can, of course, underestimate the significance of a church as a body of believers. However, the emphasis on every member is essential for public worship because, without bringing the fullness of our private, or personal characters and our personal relationship with God to the meeting, real worship cannot happen.⁹⁶⁴ But again, these individuals worship in corporate spirit, as personal religious experience cannot be separated from the communal life of believers.

Certainly, styles of worship change during the passage of time, and one can observe a shift toward professionalism, especially as/since evangelicals in Belarus now have the opportunity to study in theological schools and secular universities. Therefore, in large churches, some elements of worship are reserved for certain people; the stage may be occupied by trained musicians. The process of professionalization is gaining momentum, with the result that only congregational and group singing, and applause in less traditional churches, remain for the

⁹⁶⁰ Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship*, p. 105.

⁹⁶¹ In most churches besides “Amen” members exclaim “praise the Lord” or give thanks (they say *blagodarim* – “thank you”) after singing and reciting a poem. (Q, 2008.)

⁹⁶² Rom. 15:1.

⁹⁶³ Some Baptist ministers and members think it is very important to maintain and encourage individual participation for the benefit and spiritual growth of members. (SI, 2012.) For example, preaching causes younger members of the congregation to discipline themselves, study the Bible and pray regularly. Church leaders therefore encourage every individual to discover some gift with which to minister in worship.

⁹⁶⁴ J. Alan Kay, *The Nature of Christian Worship* (New York, Philosophical Library, 1954), p. 54. See also Walter B. Shurden, ‘The Baptist Identity,’ p. 329; Elizabeth Newman, “The Priesthood of All Believers and the Necessity of the Church,” in *Studies in Baptist History and Thought*, vol. 11. *Recycling the Past or Researching History? Studies in Baptist Historiography and Myth*, ed. by Philip E. Thompson and Anthony R. Cross, (Paternoster. 2005): 53.

majority of members. Professional and corporate participation better meet the modern trends in culture and the demands of many believers, especially from the point of view of quality. Still, Belarusian Baptists are trying to keep active participation because of the reasons set out above and because the human resources in small churches are limited. Without individual participation, public worship might not take place. This situation illustrates well the tension between the individual and the corporate aspects of worship.

7.2.2. Individual and corporate aspects in conflict

Before discussing the nature of the tension between the practice of “universal priesthood” and corporate expression of worship, the following question could be asked in any typical traditional Baptist worship: How many of those present actually take an active part in the worship? In fact few individuals take a lead or are involved in direct participation, which suggests that what is actually happening is better described as a separate “group of the priesthood” rather than universal priesthood.⁹⁶⁵ For example, the number and composition of people praying provides sufficient grounds for the critique of the very term ‘congregational prayer’ as it is usually the same group of people who takes part in the prayer of the church. Depending on the effect of the preaching and its inspirational power to encourage prayer, or the tradition established in a particular church that five to eight people pray every service and another five to eight pray once in a while, there might be no more than five to fifteen per cent of the total number of the church members actively participating. So, the element of congregational prayer actually involving the whole congregation is only “Amen” at the end of each prayer (although this way of participation is also not to be underestimated, with “the Amen of the congregation showing their acceptance of the prophetic and apostolic Word.”⁹⁶⁶)

About the same percentage of members regularly take part in preaching and reciting poems, and fewer members sing solos or duets. Up to twenty five percent sing as a part of choirs and ensembles,⁹⁶⁷ but the majority of members come to the house of prayer as listeners. This is true for many Baptist churches. “The observer’s model”⁹⁶⁸ is becoming increasingly common;

⁹⁶⁵ SI, 2012.

⁹⁶⁶ Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, p. 164.

⁹⁶⁷ Q, 2008. In the church in Borovliany, Minsk region, twelve out of twenty-seven members sing in the choir.

More examples of the percentages or numbers of those actively involved are as follows: In Voolka church, Brest, 5-8% of the church members preach, about 5% recite poetry, up to 10% pray and 20% are involved in choir ministry (Q, 2008). At “Light of Gospel” church in Minsk (446 members in 2018), preachers – twelve; prayers – about twenty (some preachers are included); singing (solos, duets, small groups) – ten; choirs (adult and youth) – fifty-five (including the same singers); musicians – ten (half of them also take part in singing); regular poem reciters – five (not including children, who are not formally members of the church); children’s choir – up to fifty (they are not the members, and sing in worship sporadically). So up to hundred members take part in worship at least once a month and around seventy do it every Sunday. (Personal notes, p. 68.)

⁹⁶⁸ Keith G. Jones, *A Shared Meal and a Common Table: Some reflections on the Lord’s Supper and Baptists* (Praha, IBTS, 2004), p. 22.

worship is perceived as some event reaching the audience, rather than something done by a congregation. The participants of worship become listeners and spectators to a performance.⁹⁶⁹ It is noteworthy that the front of the sanctuary is becoming more like a stage in a theater, and as Mark J. Harris claims, “Passive observation, the norm in Orthodoxy, also became a general (though less pronounced) feature of Baptist worship.”⁹⁷⁰ The house of prayer is not now a meeting place for corporate worship, but a place where the audience watches a group of professionals worshipping God (the members are blessed if these active participants are really professionals and if this is not a one-man show). This situation does satisfy many church members, who have little or no interest in participation. Some members do not want to preach, preferring not have the responsibility or the requirement to prepare sermons. Others cannot overcome fear or psychological barriers, especially in spoken prayer or a sermon. However, some might desire to participate but, as the quality improves, do not want to take part in worship, thus avoiding comparison with the “real professionals.”

Of course, practices differ in various churches. On the one hand, in small churches with perhaps ten to twenty-five members, more than half of the members may be involved in directly leading worship. On the other hand, large churches also have a variety of options for individual participation since they schedule a number of public worship occasions. Thereby each have opportunities to be involved, but these may arise for different reasons and therefore it is difficult to judge what might be truly classed as the priesthood of all believers in terms of looking at the active and direct participation of individual members. In small churches this may arise from necessity to ensure the worship time is filled as much as from a deep interest in every member participating,⁹⁷¹ whilst the more performance orientation of large churches may again be from necessity and they do offer a high level of opportunity to be part of orchestras, ensembles, choirs and other music groups. At least across the range of churches, worship does provide every believer with a potential opportunity to participate either individually or in a group activity.

Unfortunately, the participation of individuals can collide with the ‘fitting and orderly way’ of doing things in public worship. In such cases, individual ministry does not fully become an integral part of communal worship. Prayer, for example, may illustrate this problem.⁹⁷² As a writer in *Bratskiy Vestnik* observed, “Some simple souls quite often publicly share with the Lord (or, more exactly, with all people attending the house of prayer) all details about their feelings and experiences,” and they do it with tears, which does not edify listeners, but, on the contrary,

⁹⁶⁹ Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., *The Worship of the Church* (Greenwich: Seabury Press 1952), p. 55.

⁹⁷⁰ Harris, *Toward an Understanding of Russian Baptist Worship*, p. 9.

⁹⁷¹ QM, 2008.

⁹⁷² Q, 2008.

becomes “a temptation and a stumbling block” for them.⁹⁷³ Prayer allows individuals to express their desires before God, but extreme individualism in prayer can conflict with the desires and expectations of other worshippers, when an individual does not have a good understanding of what public worship is and the role of a member of the Body.

The challenge of worshipping as a body whilst making space for its members to participate individually is perhaps particularly acute as churches grow in number. If this is coupled with either a low level of organization and planning, or a negative attitude toward those, it can be difficult as an increasing number of participants each determine their own place and role in the meeting, as well as the length of time of their involvement and the topic. As a result, the rhythm and structure of worship are disturbed. Too many songs and too long a sermon or prayer, along with too many topics is exhausting and frustrating for the congregation.⁹⁷⁴ Nathan Nettleton, an Australian Baptist, aptly comments that such a meeting, “instead of becoming a community’s corporate offering to God, . . . will remain merely the sum of its parts, a group of people each offering their own individual worship while just happening to be in the same place.”⁹⁷⁵ Individuals may enjoy their participation but being aware of a church as one body⁹⁷⁶ requires holistic worship where horizontal ties (between church members) are not overlooked for the sake of vertical (between Christians and God). The tension lies in the fact that the latter are effective only if the former are present and being developed.⁹⁷⁷

The sense of “lawless individualism”⁹⁷⁸ that is apt to prevail when individual contribution is valued more than the process of weaving these into a communal exploration of a particular theme or aspect, is exacerbated by the fact that often desire and willingness to take part in worship prevails over the importance of thinking through what is said or contributed, and by the continuing belief that dedication and maturity, rather than preparation, is the best channel for the free activity of the Holy Spirit in worship. This is further complicated by the difficult area of discerning motives or motivation. The necessity to express the self runs the risk of arising from narcissism and if this then becomes the foundation of participation, the church is “optional, secondary to the individual.”⁹⁷⁹ Music ministry is especially vulnerable, particularly where individual singing prevails over congregational singing,⁹⁸⁰ and worship resembles a concert and talent parade. David Fagerberg criticizes such an approach, reminding that “There is a great

⁹⁷³ V.S., “Voprosy dukhovnoy zhizni,” p. 23.

⁹⁷⁴ SI, 2012.

⁹⁷⁵ Nathan Nettleton, “Making Meaning in Worship,” in *Currents in Baptist Theology of Worship Today*, ed. Jones and Parushev, p. 85.

⁹⁷⁶ 1 Cor. 12:13.

⁹⁷⁷ Eph. 4:16.

⁹⁷⁸ Underhill, *Worship*, p. 235.

⁹⁷⁹ Newman, “The Priesthood of All Believers and the Necessity of the Church,” p. 54.

⁹⁸⁰ Church in Orsha. Personal visit of the author to the church service, 7 June 2009 (Personal notes, p. 53b.)

therapeutic value in expressing ourselves, but this is not the service commanded of us at the altar of the Lord.”⁹⁸¹

When personal desires and demands prevail in worship, the edifying element suffers, and perhaps more seriously, worship faces the danger of becoming anthropocentric and it is not easy to find Christ where two or three are gathered together in His name.⁹⁸² The blessings of the worship become heavily dependent on particular persons who preach, sing, play music, witness, or pray. Famous singers attract people and enjoy popularity but the church gathering loses its “radical Christocentrism,”⁹⁸³ which was always inherent in free worship. Building a time of integrated collective worship and strong sense of direction is not without its vulnerabilities either, of inappropriate exercise of control, concentration of the process into too few hands and the exclusion of those who do not ‘fit’ comfortably into the looked-for quality.

Because church consists of individual believers, some tensions are inevitable in any kind of worship. Certainly, the problems and disadvantages of individualism can be solved partly by planning, teaching, and appropriate limits, but it is this area where church members can grow and learn how to serve each other in the best way. But on the whole, the tension between the individual and communal aspects of worship will remain till the Lord comes. Worship on this earth is a rehearsal, a preparation for worship in Heaven, where all tensions and discrepancies will be removed by the perfect worship Leader.

7.3. Public worship in the secular environment

7.3.1. Traditional forms and culture in conflict

If the relationship of Baptist beliefs of the priesthood of all believers is important within the church, the relationship of Baptists to secular culture beyond the house of prayer is equally important. Worship, as a meeting of Christians, marked with special terminology and a special worldview, is open at the same time to those unfamiliar with the Gospel and church culture, to, as Paul terms it in 1 Corinthians 14:23, “ungifted men and unbelievers.” Also, as expressed in verses 24 and 25, the sermons songs should convict them and call them to account, so they will fall on their face “and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.”⁹⁸⁴ Tensions arise at the junction of worship and mass (or multi-media) culture, since it is difficult to reconcile the needs of representatives of church with secular culture, the wishes of experienced believers

⁹⁸¹ David W. Fagerberg, “A Theology of the Liturgy,” *Liturgical Ministry*, vol. 14 (Fall 2005): 174.

⁹⁸² Thomas Merton, “Liturgy and Spiritual Personalism,” *Worship*, vol. XXXIV, no. 9 (October, 1960): 505.

⁹⁸³ Kent Hughes, “Free Church Worship: The Challenge of Freedom,” in *Worship by the Book*, eds. D.A. Carson, Timothy Keller, Mark Ashton, and Kent Hughes (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002): 154.

⁹⁸⁴ 1 Cor. 14:24-25.

with young believers or “outsiders,”⁹⁸⁵ and “good old traditions” with popular elements of contemporary culture.⁹⁸⁶

These issues were not so much under discussion in the twentieth century. As has been already demonstrated, the Christians were primarily interested in the occasion of worship rather than its form. Secondly, during the Soviet era, especially with the severe persecution in the end of 1920s, there was almost no contact between worship and secular culture because boundaries between the church and the world, as well as between believers and non-believers, were clearly defined. The great majority of those attending worship were raised in a Christian environment; few neophytes adjusted to evangelical subculture. Later, approximately ten to fifteen years after the celebration of the Millenium of the Baptism of Rus' in 1998, when the world became more “friendly,” churches were busy with evangelism and the construction of houses of prayer. They lacked time for the analysing and understanding of public worship, and they did not see any need to do so.

The debates began in the first decade of the twenty-first century. A new situation has arisen as many people who had been raised in a secular culture have come to worship, and, on the other hand, there have been significantly more opportunities for ministries outside the house of prayer and more opportunities for believers to become involved in social and cultural life. Baptist young people in large numbers now receive education in higher schools, whereas this was rarely possible thirty or forty years ago, and enjoy more of the fruits of secular culture. Connection to all parts of the world through the Internet also overcomes many barriers. As a result, a generation and cultural gap has arisen even within the church, and many believers are attracted to adopting forms of worship that reflect what they experience in the new culture.

⁹⁸⁵ 1 Cor. 5:12.

⁹⁸⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr defines culture as “that total process of human activity” that “comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values.” (H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1951], p. 32.) Frank C. Senn makes our task difficult, pointing out that “In complex modern societies people actually participate in several cultures simultaneously: a national culture, a regional culture, a local culture, an ethnic or racial culture, a family culture, and a religious culture.” (Frank C. Senn, *Introduction to Christian Liturgy* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012], p. 38.) Similarly, Gerard Lukken points out that “the culture is not univocal. Therefore one should never speak of only one culture, but there are always many cultures, both in succession to one another (diachronic) and simultaneously (synchronic). No one culture thus has absolute value, and every culture is only relative.” See Lukken, *Ritual in Abundance. Critical Reflections on the Place, Form and Identity of Christian Ritual in our Culture* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), p. 171), p. 171. Martin Stringer highlights the same issue from an anthropological point of view. “As an anthropologist, therefore, I find the concept of ‘culture’ far too vague and much too slippery for the kind of purposes that I am trying to engage with in this text. Perhaps equally problematic is the relationship between ‘culture’ and ‘religion’.” (Martin Stringer, *A Sociological History of Christian Worship* [Cambridge University Press, 2005]), p. 9.) But for our purposes we do not need to have too narrow or specific definition. Anscar J. Chupungco lists values, cultural patterns, and institutions among the components of culture, here I concentrate on the cultural patterns (thought pattern, language patterns, rites and symbols, literature, music). (Anscar J. Chupungco, “Liturgy and the Components of Culture,” in *Worship and Culture in Dialogue*, ed. S. Anita Sauffer (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1994): 156-164.) It is possible to speak about pop culture, the world of ideas and images of an average Belarusian, including pop music, films, and popular entertainments. This world is largely formed by the media, especially television, and for the younger generation by the Internet. Lukken puts it in this way: “Popular culture is rather the culture which people unconsciously share with one another” (Lukken, *Ritual in Abundance*, p. 373.)

Positive perception of the elements of secular culture has resulted in the fact that the church and state boundary has shifted and it is now inside the church.

A search for new methods of evangelism once the waves of people coming into churches ceased also contributed to this tension.⁹⁸⁷ Some Baptists began to adapt popular forms and styles from theater and popular music in an effort to attract non-believers and to interpret the Gospel in forms relevant for outsiders and young churchgoers.⁹⁸⁸ Christopher Ellis describes it as the tension between “a desire for ‘holy’ worship for a ‘holy’ people and the missionary urge to offer ‘relevant’ worship for a consumerist generation.”⁹⁸⁹

Indeed, Belarusian Baptists had already made use of the cultural elements of their own day during the period of their formation in the attempt to attract people and make public worship more accessible. In the 1920s, when evaluating evangelical public worship from an Orthodox perspective, some critics accused Baptists of such an unprecedented innovation as putting a piano in the sanctuary.⁹⁹⁰ Now a piano is considered to be an essential attribute of traditional worship and it is electronic instruments and pop-music that have become the points of contention instead. It is important to note that even though electronic instruments were widely used in the Council of Churches⁹⁹¹ in the 1970s and 1980s as a means of attracting young people (primarily from Christian families) to church, they were of limited use, and the traditional worship structure was not under pressure to change. Pop-songs were an addition to traditional singing. The early twenty-first century however, is special in the intensity and scale of the introduction of new music styles.

7.3.2. Cultural gap

Music styles provoke most of the debates but they seem to be only the tip of the iceberg. The issues of preaching and the use of Bible texts in public worship appear to be even more serious. In traditional worship services preachers use the Russian Synodal translation. Even young churches stay faithful to it, although they may sometimes use a new translation by the

⁹⁸⁷ In some cases, this search led to the splitting of youth groups from traditional churches and the formation of new ones, such as the youth-oriented churches “Pure Heart” in Brest, “Reconciliation” in Bobruisk, Mogilev region, church “Without Walls” in Pinsk, Brest region which were formed between 2007-2013. Attempts to break with the traditional form and to plant new churches by the separation of active youth from a “mother” church have been made in some other churches in Grodno, Baranovichi, Brest region and Slutsk, Minsk region. In each of these cases a number of other factors—the influence of other churches and leaders, ties to western churches, financial support, and internal conflicts—contributed to the formation of the churches, but the yearning to put public worship in the context of modern culture and to use it as a means of outreach and training young people became one of the determinants for change.

⁹⁸⁸ For example, “Light of Gospel” church in Minsk which practices a traditional style of worship, does not countenance electronic music but it does put on theater performances at Christmas.

⁹⁸⁹ Christopher J. Ellis, “Who is Worship For? Dispatches from the War Zone,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2 (Summer, 2009): 179.

⁹⁹⁰ Khaytun and Kapayevich, *Suchasnaya sektantstva na Belarusi*, p. 44.

⁹⁹¹ See footnote 26.

Russian Bible Society from 2011,⁹⁹² or a translation by the International Bible Society from 2007.⁹⁹³ The Synodal translation was published in 1876. In this translation there are many archaisms and transliterated loanwords from the Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin languages, requiring translation or explanation,⁹⁹⁴ as well as many Slavonicisms.⁹⁹⁵ The pronunciation of some Slavonicisms is similar to well-known Russian words, but the meaning is different.⁹⁹⁶ Also titles, plant and animal names, units of measure or coins for many readers are unclear.⁹⁹⁷ In 2000 the Russian Bible Society published a Bible edition with a dictionary of five hundred and seventy words that needed to be explained, and there were about three hundred Slavonicisms among them. Archaism characterized the first edition of the Synodal translation, but the difference between Church Slavonic and the Russian language was not so great at that time. However, experts did call attention to this issue in the early twentieth century when I.E. Yevseyev wrote,

It is much more important that the Synodal translation is outdated as literature. The language of this translation is difficult, out-of-date, and artificially drawn close to Slavonic. It is a century behind common literary language and is totally unacceptable to be used in literature because it came from the period before Pushkin.⁹⁹⁸

⁹⁹² “New Earth,” Minsk. (Dmitriy Mamoiko, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 21 November 2014 [Personal notes, p. 73].) “New Testament” Church from its outset (March 2015) uses a new translation of the Russian Bible Society as a liturgical text. (Sergei Luk’yanov, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 12 September 2017 [Personal notes, p. 73].)

⁹⁹³ “Light of Hope,” Minsk; “Church ‘Without Walls’” in Pinsk. (Mikhail Stepnov and Dmitriy Polukhovich, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 21 November 2014 [Personal notes, p. 73].)

⁹⁹⁴ They are words such as the Jewish “Amen,” “kidar” (turban, Exod. 28:4), and “Osanna” (Hosanna, Matt. 21:9); the Aramaic “Avva” (Abba, Mark 14:36), “Maran-afa” and “anathema” (1 Cor. 16:22), “raka” (good-for-nothing, Matt. 5:22); the Greek “akridy” (locusts, Matt. 3:4), “diadema” (diadem, Isa. 28:5), “ipostas” (hypostasis, Heb. 1:3), “phelon” (the cloak, 2 Tim. 4:13); the Latin “legion” (Matt. 26:53) and “pretoria” (the Praetorium, Matt. 27:27).

⁹⁹⁵ Loanwords from Church Slavonic language include: “Biytsa” (pugnacious, 1 Tim. 3:3), “blagoutrobnny” (the tender mercy, Luke 1:78), “breniye” (clay of the spittle, John 9:6), “vezhdy” (eyelids, Psalm 11:4), “vozglaviye” (the head, Gen. 47:31), “vyya” (neck, 2 Kings 17:14), “glagol” (the word, Luke 3:2), “gorlitsa” (turtledove, Gen. 15:9), “dlan” (hand, Prov. 31:20), “dshcher” (daughter, Matt. 9:22), “igo” (yoke, Matt. 11:29), “lanity” (cheeks, Song of Sol. 1:10), “odr” (bedstead, Deut. 3:11), “chado” (child, Luke 16:25), among others.

⁹⁹⁶ For example “bran” (struggle, Eph. 6:12), “koleno” (the tribe, Num. 2:5), “okopy” (barricade, Luke 19:43), “pozorishche” (spectacle, 1 Cor. 4:9), “tochilo” (a wine press, Matt. 21:33), “t’ma” (myriads, Num. 12:22), “khudozhnik” (architect, Heb. 11:10), “yazyk” (tongue, Rev. 5:9), and “yasli” (manger, Luke 2:7). Now these words mean correspondingly quarrel or strife, knee, trench, shameful event, grindstone, darkness, artist, tongue or language, nursery.

⁹⁹⁷ Like “Augustus,” “air” (calamus, Song of Sol. 4:14), “yavor” (plane tree, Gen. 30:37), “anaka” (the gecko, Lev. 11:30), “aspid” (cobra, Psalm 91:13), “gomor” and “yefa” (omer and ephah, Exod. 16:36), “lokot” (a cubit, Gen. 6:16), “siki” (shekel, Gen. 23:15), “lepta” and “kodrant” (copper coin and a cent, Mark 12:42), etc. See *Bibliya. Knigi Sviashchennogo Pisaniya Vetkhogo i Novogo Zaveta. Kanonicheskiye* [The Bible. The Books of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. Canonical] (Moskva: Rossiiskoye bibleyskoye obshchestvo, 2000), Slovar’ and Vedeniye [Glossary and introduction].

⁹⁹⁸ I.E. Yevseyev, *Sobor i Bibliya* [The Council and the Bible] (Sanct-Peterburg: Sinodal’naya Tipografiya, 1917), p. 5.

The difference between the language of public worship and a secular person’s vocabulary could be illustrated by the Epistle to the Galatians 5:19 (the Synodical translation): “Dela ploti izvestny; oni sut’: prelyubodeyaniye, blud, nechistota, nepotrebstvo.” (Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality). First of all, what is “ploti” or “dela ploti”? In everyday conversation “ploti” means “body” or “soft part of the body” and it does not have the meaning of sinful nature. Secondly, the words “prelyubodeyaniye”

Yet the lack of alternatives for many years, the influence of the Synodal translation on Christians, and the significance of the translation for the origin and development of the evangelical movement put it in a unique position and attributed a special aura to it and the status of “the inspired by God translation.”⁹⁹⁹ At a pastors’ conference for the churches of Minsk region on February 23, 2013, Nikolai Kolesnikov, an authoritative teacher in traditional Baptist circles and a writer of a number of books, warned the ministers against making use of new translations and called them to stay faithful to the Synodal translation, stressing its special value in our churches’ history, its effectiveness, and life-changing power. He added that giving up the Synodal translation would lead to biblical illiteracy, since Bible cross references and commentaries in Russian are based on the Synodal translation.

A terminology and style from more than one hundred and thirty years ago appears not only in Bible translations but also in sermons, prayers, poems, and the language of worship. For example, public worship often begins with a greeting “I extend my greetings to you, dear brothers and sisters.”¹⁰⁰⁰ Such a greeting is usually not used in everyday life, particularly of those who do not attend church, and in a church using a modern worship style, it is often replaced with neutral phrases such as “good morning,” “good evening” or “hello.” Then archaic lofty adjectives as “blessed,” “glorious,” and “didactic/edificatory” are often used in traditional worship although they are rarely heard in everyday speech.¹⁰⁰¹

Although this is not a typical case, one incident illustrates the difficulty well. The pastor of “Salvation” church in Kolodishchi, Minsk region, told of a woman who attended their public worship for the very first time in her life in May 2013. On her way back home, she was asked if she understood the message. She responded, “Well, the preacher was speaking in Church Slavonic language, so how could I understand it?” The preacher had used the Synodal translation and preached in Russian, referring to terminology familiar for regular attendants, such as

and “blud,” as well as “nepotrebstvo,” are not generally used in everyday speech or by the mass media. They are substituted by such words as “sozhitel'stvo,” which is “cohabitation,” “supruzheskaya izmena” – “unfaithfulness” and perhaps “razvrat” – “lechery.” Thirdly, “nechistota” is used in its physical meaning (in spiritual meaning it is used with a noun – “nechistaya mysl’,” which is “impure thought”). So, if an unbeliever does not understand the meaning of the words, in the words of 1 Cor. 14:24-25 he is not convicted by all, he is not called to account by all and the secrets of his heart are not disclosed.

⁹⁹⁹ Compare with the position of the King James Version in English.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Forty years ago, N. Khrapov insisted that “it is a sin to use a greeting synonymous to the one the world uses – ‘Hello!’” *Dom Bozhiy i sluzheniye v nem*, ch. 60.

¹⁰⁰¹ Other typical expressions (“Canaanite” language) which are heard only in public worship include “bless each heart,” “let us bow down our hearts,” “speak to each heart,” “put something on the heart,” “young hearts,” “be washed in the blood of Jesus,” “grant eternal life,” “draw strength,” “cover with grace,” “contemplate with the heart’s eyes,” “kneel down with the heart,” “feed on the word of God,” “may the Lord grant you abundant blessings,” “ministry of the word,” “a lost sheep,” etc.

“umilostivleniye,” “osvyashcheniye,” “blagodat” (“propitiation,” “sanctification,” and “grace”) but that would not necessarily be familiar to the general public.¹⁰⁰²

The cultural gap is particularly evident in the use of musical forms which are not characteristic of the mass culture of the early twenty-first century. In addition to choral singing some churches enrich worship by a wind and folk instrument orchestra.¹⁰⁰³ These forms, especially popular in the first third of the twentieth century, are associated now with military music and folklore, and they do not play a significant role in secular culture. Besides, traditional worship usually uses hymns written and translated in the nineteenth and the first third of the twentieth century, such as “Blizhe, Gospod', k Tebe” (Nearer, Lord, to Thee), “Bud'te bodry i vseгда molites'” (Be Cheerful and Always Pray), “Tverdo ya veryu” (I Firmly Believe).¹⁰⁰⁴ They reflect the language of their own day and just in the first ten hymns of Songs of Revival hymn collection it is possible to find plenty of words that could be considered outdated, bookish and/or religious terminology.¹⁰⁰⁵

Other aspects of the cultural gap include the appearance of Christians. Especially in ICCECB, women are expected to cover their heads, wear long skirts, avoid jewellery such as chains, rings, earrings, and even wedding bands, and they wear their hair long. Under no circumstances would women in these churches come to public worship wearing trousers (sisters keep this rule in other public places as well as in their own home). Brothers, especially preachers, could be singled out by wearing a shirt with no tie. So, it is easy to identify people who belong and those who are strangers, both in the house of prayer and even outside it. However, in the Baptist Union churches, the requirements for the appearance are not as strict, and the women experiment with make-up, jewellery, haircuts, even though in a moderate manner, so the external differences from the “world” are less obvious.

7.3.3. *From culture to subculture*

So traditional worship reflects Niebuhr's model of “Christ against culture.”¹⁰⁰⁶ Its form and content are evidences of separation from the world, the rejection of secular culture. In the

¹⁰⁰² Nikolai Sinkovets, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 28 May 2013 (Personal notes, p. 73.)

¹⁰⁰³ Churches in Voolka and on Fortechaya 61/1, Brest; church in Kobrin, Brest region.

¹⁰⁰⁴ *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, nos. 22, 25, 184. “Tverdo ya veryu” originally written as “Blessed Assurance.”

¹⁰⁰⁵ “Divnyy, osenyat', l'nut', mol'ba, sviashchennoye obshchen'ye, lik, chada, vnimat', molen'ye, otrada, nisposylat', obremenenny, uzret',” which mean “amazing, overhang, cling, plea, holy fellowship, face, children, listen, prayer, delight, grant, burdened, and behold.” These words are not currently in everyday use. Outdated words give the songs loftiness and an air of solemnity but the aesthetic component dominates the semantic, and they do not meet the principle of edification (section 6.3). Since the realities behind these words have not disappeared the words could be replaced by modern equivalents, although in most cases it is rather difficult as the rhythm and rhyme of poetry would be violated.

¹⁰⁰⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr in his book *Christ and Culture* explores five different approaches that Christians may take to culture: opposition, agreement, Christ above culture, tension, and reformation. Here I refer to the first attitude—opposition. D.A. Carson in his book *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans

words of Tatyana Nikol'skaya in relation to the life of Baptist churches in the Soviet Union in the second half of the twentieth century, "Reticence, a special life style and clothes and even unique vocabulary, rather obscure for the people around, are characteristics of such subculture."¹⁰⁰⁷ For this type of worldview, self-preservation and survival was the main goal,¹⁰⁰⁸ and it was only natural that the desire to separate from the "sinful world" was expressed in worship in a concentrated form.

It should be noted once again that, for the most part, the character of traditional worship has been defined by historical and political contexts, by hostility and persecution by the state that excluded the believers from social and cultural life. On the other hand, this situation stimulated the creation of their own world, and public worship as a shelter. The world could do nothing but harm; dialogue and being open would make the church vulnerable to sinful influence. The impact of the Orthodox environment with its adherence to the archaic and old, even though mysterious and incomprehensible, contributed to such approach to worship as well.

Using Henri Bergson's terminology, Mikhail Cherenkov refers to "a closed type of Christianity" to describe evangelicals living in a similar context in Ukraine, where he noted such characteristics as

a demonstrative rejection of dialogue with modern culture, faith which is associated with birth and upbringing and which corresponds to the understanding of religion as moral and culture-forming, submission of values of freedom to the value of church authority, church autarky, and hostility to the secular world.¹⁰⁰⁹

In fact, staying active and open to the world characterized many Christians but their active position was related only to preaching the Gospel. These communities called for a high degree of commitment, and there was an initiation process which introduced the newcomer to a community marked by strong self-awareness, and the maintenance of a countercultural rhetoric.¹⁰¹⁰ An application for church membership through baptism was a heroic action in Soviet days, and points to this kind of stance, as can be seen in this application from Maria Shakhlevich in 1979:

Publishing Co., 2008) criticizes Niebuhr's position for simplification and primitivism. He believes that the concept of dialogue between Christ (Christianity) and culture holds intrinsic controversy, since all kinds of Christianity are inherently an expression of culture. It is possible that Niebuhr's classification presents some difficulty on the level of terminology and cultural studies but it is still a handy tool with which to compare the approaches of various Christian groups to mass culture.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Nikol'skaya, "Uroki istorii dlya EKhB," p. 10.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Cherenkov, *Evropeis'ka reformatsiya ta ukrains'kyi évanhel's'kyi protestantyzm*, pp. 271-272.

¹⁰¹⁰ Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*, pp. 92-93.

I ask Lesovenskaya church to accept me as a member through water baptism, as I wish to become a member of the church of Christ and to proclaim the teachings of Christ to all people ignorant of Him. I promise to be a fearless witness of the Gospel in the world around me.¹⁰¹¹

Thereby an active stance with regard to preaching the Gospel was combined with a hostile attitude to secular culture, and this situation contributed to establishing a special evangelical microclimate, subculture or “cultural enclave,”¹⁰¹² evident in many areas, including in the content and style of worship. Meanwhile the desire for worshipping God in spirit and in truth, a growing understanding of the relativity of worship forms and their historical development, along with attempts to attract young people, and pronounced evangelical motives, led many ministers to adjust public worship to the way of thinking of the twenty-first century listener. Cherenkov has remarked that “isolationism, radical conservatism and separatism were replaced by the acknowledgement of secularization of the world as an objective fact, which requires modernization and church reform.”¹⁰¹³ In Baptist churches there have been moves towards change and adaptations for particular situations, and special events such as concerts, festivals, holiday performances, nights of questions and answers, and evangelistic meetings with a musical style similar to popular music and sermon language appropriate to those who are relatively unacquainted with the Bible. Nevertheless, a bolder move is required if this cultural gap is going to be overcome that involves reforming theology at a broader level. The following chapter focuses on the types of theological and practical steps that this thesis proposes are needed to overcome the conflict between traditional forms and culture, particularly with respect to the three major areas outlined above: the expression of freedom and the order in worship, the tension between the public character of worship and the participation of individual members, and the cultural tensions within worship and between worship and wider society.

¹⁰¹¹ 1 July 1978. Archive, Church ECB in Lesovnia, Soligorsk district, Minsk region.

¹⁰¹² Cherenkov, *Evropeis'ka reformatsiya ta ukrains'kyi évanhel's'kyi protestantyzm*, p. 453.

¹⁰¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

CHAPTER 8. OVERCOMING THE TENSIONS

An analysis of the tensions in traditional worship identified a number of problems concerning organizational quality, content, the conflict of individual with communal aspects of worship, and dangers of social and cultural isolationism. In order to address these tensions, inner resources can be employed – for instance, worship practice in other Baptist churches in Belarus, acquaintance with the history and formation of Russian-speaking worship, development of theology of worship within the framework of spiritual education, etc. However, it is also helpful to set the discussion against the experience of other worship traditions in the local context. Even a brief engagement holds the possibility of suggesting some principles and practices that might be borrowed by and implemented in traditional Baptist worship.

Orthodox worship is a clear model of a service structure, order and organization, that is sometimes lacking in Baptist worship. Of special interest are Orthodox sermons at the level of particular components, examples of which can be found not only in churches, but also online. Orthodox worship also suggests options in engaging various senses, not just hearing. However, the main difficulty in borrowing from the Orthodox worship stems from the history of the relationship conflicts of the Baptist and Orthodox as well as radical differences in approach to the worship service.

Roman Catholic worship in Belarus, interestingly, is much closer to traditional Baptist worship in its content and form, and even in the way it looks. For example, the majority of the congregation sits during worship; some aspects of modern technology, like multimedia projectors, are employed; and much attention is paid to the verbal component, including preaching, and congregation participation, such as singing, saying Psalms, the Lord's Prayer, and the Creed. The Belarusian language is actively used in worship, along with Polish and Russian.¹⁰¹⁴

¹⁰¹⁴ The use of the Belarusian language in Belarus is an ambiguous and controversial question. Perhaps, in terms of the future (largely depending on the political development of the country), this can be effective, but currently the vast majority of people speak Russian. The Russian language is also the main language of the media, politics, science, and education. In the beginning of the twenty-first century there was not a single higher education establishment with the curriculum in Belarusian. Office work and legal proceedings are almost absent in Belarusian. The Belarusian language has a symbolic rather than communication function. See U.B. Koryakov, "Yazykovaya situatsiya v Belorussii i tipologiya yazykovykh situatsiy. Dissertatsiya na soiskaniye uchenoy stepeni kandidata filosoficheskikh nauk" [Language Situation in Belarus and the Typology of Language Situations. Thesis for the Degree of Candidate of Philosophical Sciences] (Moskva: Moskovskiy Gosudarstvennyy Universitet im. M.V. Lomonosova, 2002), see especially pp. 57-61. Also, Pavol Sevyarynets, *Lyublyu Belarus': 200 fenomenau natsyyanal'nay idei* [I love Belarus: 200 Phenomenon of National Idea] (Vil'nya: Institut belarusistyki, 2008), pp. 302-304. See also an article that explores the linguistic identity of the country by Nelly Bekus, "Hybrid Linguistic Identity of Post-Soviet Belarus," *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2014): 26-51. In some churches, hymns may be sung in Belarusian, as is done on a regular basis in churches "Grace of God" in Bobruisk, Mogilev region and in Orsha, Vitebsk region (Personal visits of the author to the church services, 30 December 2012 and 25 August 2013, respectively [Personal notes, p. 15]). There are two sermons during worship in "Grace of God" church in Bobruisk, and the second one (in the evening) has been preached in Belarusian since

The comparison with the Catholic church could be interesting since it is a minority religion in Belarus and in popular understanding it is defined as a ‘foreign’ church (‘Latin,’ ‘Polish’ or ‘Roman’). The same would be true of Baptists, who are also considered to be of a foreign nature.¹⁰¹⁵ In addition Catholic worship has experienced reform after the Second Vatican Council. Martin Stringer reminds us that

The *Constitution on the Liturgy* that was produced as a consequence of the Council was one of the most far-reaching documents in the history of Christian worship, as it enabled a revolution in liturgical thinking and practice, not just within the Catholic Church but across all the mainline churches.¹⁰¹⁶

Comments on the meaning of Scripture and its relation to worship¹⁰¹⁷ and the demand for varied and suitable Bible reading¹⁰¹⁸ are very valuable and relevant. Recommendations to maintain a balance between adherence to sound traditions and openness to legitimate changes which are preceded by “theological, historical, and pastoral” reflection,¹⁰¹⁹ are still relevant, given the tension between traditional and new forms of worship in the Baptist churches of Belarus. Acquaintance with the experience of adapting Catholic worship services in Belarus can indeed be useful.

Nevertheless, the perception of fundamental theological differences does not encourage the exchange of experience or interaction. In the *Constitution on the Liturgy*, the main role in building liturgy is played by the hierarchical structure,¹⁰²⁰ which differs from the Baptist structure that relies on a horizontal network of churches. In addition to restricting the rights of local priests, the *Constitution* also prescribes the priority of the Latin language (in Latin rites) and the restriction of local languages.¹⁰²¹ Such statements demonstrate how closely worship is tied with theology and church structure, so any mechanical transfer of form will not always be productive, if it does not take into account the principles underlying the changes.

The Reformed or Methodist traditions, placed between “left” and “right-wing”¹⁰²² and

2014. (Sergei Gormash, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 11 December 2017 [Personal notes, p. 73b].)

Baptist church “Ascension” in Minsk, consisting of nearly twenty members, does worship in Belarusian and it also makes use of folk culture elements, including ancient national music instruments and songs. At the moment the suggested form looks somewhat exotic and cut off from everyday life.

¹⁰¹⁵ Cf. Chapter 3.2. The Reform of the Sacred Liturgy.

¹⁰¹⁶ Stringer, *A Sociological History of Christian Worship*, p. 220. Anderson, writing in the 1980s, confirms this claim and comments in this respect that the notable thing about “Protestant worship today is that it is in dialogue with more than its own tradition.” (Fred R. Anderson R., “Protestant Worship Today,” *Theology Today*, vol. 43, no. 1 [1986]: 64.)

¹⁰¹⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ch. 1.3.24.

¹⁰¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. 1.3.35.

¹⁰¹⁹ *Ibid.*, ch. 1.2.23.

¹⁰²⁰ *Ibid.*, ch. 1.2.22.

¹⁰²¹ *Ibid.*, ch. 1.3.36.

¹⁰²² White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*, pp. 21-24. Also see section 7.1.1. of this thesis.

with a focus on spending time in reading, studying the Bible, and singing, might be a helpful reference point. Although they are not developed enough in Belarus,¹⁰²³ studying their practice and heritage may be useful as their approach could enrich Baptist worship in terms of the interaction of freedom and form as well as a reinforcement of the corporate element in worship. Section 8.2.3. of this chapter (*Inculturation: a theological model for traditional Baptist worship*) does utilise the model from reformed theologian John Witvliet to analyse of the relation between worship and local culture.

The Pentecostal church is wide-spread in Belarus, which represents the “left-wing” category as defined earlier in chapter six.¹⁰²⁴ In some areas of worship the Pentecostals may be even more suspicious of planned forms of services.¹⁰²⁵ However, in the same manner as Baptist worship, their pursuit of freedom has a negative effect, so they state in a recently published Confession that “conducting worship in any group of believers always requires prayerful preliminary ordering of worship elements. It is especially true when worship takes place in a local church with many people.”¹⁰²⁶ The authors of Confession refer to 1 Cor. 14:26-40, but they warn at the same time that

These words do not imply that God’s grace in public worship should be limited. On the contrary, when we avoid chaos and spend time in organizing worship and looking forward to the revelation of the Holy Spirit, we promote the Lord’s work in the hearts of Christians.”¹⁰²⁷

Being aware of the shortcomings of over-stressing the aspect of freedom, traditional Baptist worship could be enriched by the dynamics, vivacity and emotionality of the Pentecostal worship. The concern about the future of traditional public worship prompts the search for ways in which worship might be renewed in order to satisfy the spiritual demands of Christians and attract seekers, positively influencing all the worshippers.

The experience of various traditions may indeed offer helpful insights in addressing the tensions in worship and enabling the search for a healthy balance in worship. However, it must

¹⁰²³ According to the media source, religia.by, which covers the main spheres of religious life in the Republic of Belarus, as of 16 May 2019 there was one officially registered Evangelical reformed church, two Lutheran churches and there was neither a Methodist nor Presbyterian Church in Minsk. (<http://religia.by/religioznye-organizacii/svodnyj-perechen-zaregistrirovannyx-religioznyx-obshhin-v-g-minske>, last accessed 16 May 2019.)

¹⁰²⁴ See this thesis, section 6.1.1. Freedom in worship. I should remind again that for much of the Soviet period the Pentecostals were forcibly united with AUCECB, and thus really part of the same worship tradition (see section 1.1.).

¹⁰²⁵ The pastor of the Pentecostal church in Minsk region, Pavel Kalosha, admitted in a homiletics class that over the number of years of his ministry in Pentecostal churches in Minsk and Minsk area he had never encountered someone preaching a series of sermons. He had not preached a series of sermons himself either. He chose topics as other Pentecostal ministers did, “by inspiration.” (Personal interview with author, Minsk, 22 March 2013 [Personal notes, p. 65].)

¹⁰²⁶ Verouchenie Ob'edinionnoi tserkvi khristian very evangel'skoi v Respublike Belarus', izd. 2, p. 167.

¹⁰²⁷ Ibid., 167.

also be kept in mind that there is no need for a final solution because “healthy tension”¹⁰²⁸ can make a significant contribution to the wholeness and vitality of worship. The following sections examine more closely the three key areas of freedom and forms, the personal and public aspects of worship, and cultural gaps to see how the tensions inherent in them might be addressed, whilst acknowledging the necessity of those tensions for bringing full value to the nature of worship in Belarusian Baptist churches.

8.1. Freedom and forms

8.1.1. *Striving for balance*

Some of the contradictions can be eliminated or reduced with a proper understanding of the opposites and their reciprocal concessions to each other. In this case the approach to worship taken by the Apostle Paul and his advice in 1 Corinthians 12-14 (especially 14:26-33) are crucial with regard to the free worship tradition and may help evaluate the relationship of form and freedom in worship. As William Abernethy notes, Paul maintains a delicate balance between spirit and order in worship, by keeping worship “open to the power of the spontaneous life of the Spirit” and recognizing “that people can be carried away into divisive and unhealthy excesses when they open themselves in an undisciplined, unknowing way to that life of the Spirit.”¹⁰²⁹

Paul’s understanding of spirit and order reflects the whole biblical teaching. Despite the fact that freedom and forms occupy a different place in the continuum of the Old and New Testaments, neither the Old nor the New Testament reject forms and freedom;¹⁰³⁰ we build our worship on the twin pillars—Jachin and Boaz, which symbolize freedom and order.¹⁰³¹ Liberty and structure do not necessarily confront each other, as they may be two sides of the same. In fact, all formal elements can be practiced in a spirit of freedom; reading a Bible passage should not be read in any other way than in the spirit of freedom.¹⁰³² This prerequisite lays the foundation for further discussion, as it pays tribute to both form and freedom, and at the same time limits freedom, with the understanding that forms are still not allowed to quench the Spirit.¹⁰³³

¹⁰²⁸ Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Learning Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Book, 2008), p. 156.

¹⁰²⁹ Abernethy, *A New Look for Sunday Morning*, p. 48.

¹⁰³⁰ Segler, *Christian Worship, Its Theology and Practice*, p. 12.

¹⁰³¹ 3 Kings 7:21. S.F. Winward uses this image in his book *The Reformation of Our Worship* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press Limited, 1964), p. 74.

¹⁰³² It is also possible to choose the texts in the spirit of freedom. McGowan states, “The early references to Christian communal reading suggest texts chosen according to occasion or opportunity, in keeping with more charismatic aspects of the communal discourse, rather than set patterns such as lectionaries.” (*Ancient Christian Worship*, p. 99.) This practice could be justified in the free worship tradition.

¹⁰³³ 1 Cor. 14:32-33; 14:30.

A more “excellent way”¹⁰³⁴ requires adapting freedom and structure to each other. Freedom may be limited, or, better, regulated and the structure may be adjusted to particular situations. As with the first Baptists in England, in the midst of the desire for freedom and flexibility in worship, a church can look for order while still leaving room for spontaneity,¹⁰³⁵ because “successful, ongoing worship depends in part on the creative pull from both extremes of spontaneity or order.”¹⁰³⁶ Order may be expressed by limiting the time for participation and number of participants; freedom may be expressed in the content of components and their diversity. Evelyn Underhill notes that

the great Protestant churches of Germany, Scandinavia, Scotland, and Holland have each developed a type of worship which retains a sufficient traditional and liturgical element to ensure stability, and even some continuity with the historic Christian cultus; whilst leaving room for the expression of that prophetic, ethical, spontaneous element in the primitive Christian response to God, which every reform and revival seeks to restore.¹⁰³⁷

Striving for balance, freedom in worship is especially important in large churches that put more emphasis on quality and a limited number of professional “performers.” Involving guests from other churches with their program, participation of youth, and personal testimony of spiritual experiences during the week can open doors to the breathing of the Spirit. Organization is not an encroachment on the work of the Spirit and the participants’ inspiration; rather it is the wise stewardship of freedom, resulting from understanding its purpose in worship.

Yet, in the context of 1 Corinthians 12-14, spontaneity and freedom do not serve to express individuality or create an informal atmosphere. Paul speaks about the edification and benefit of the church, and the principle of edification may require a restriction of individual freedom. If forethought serves the content better than improvisation, freedom must give way to a certain form and a prepared in advance plan. Paul Hoon argues that “form can provide wings without which aspiration would remain limp and unalive. It can also chasten and channel aspiration in its freedom.”¹⁰³⁸ So Baptists might add depth to the level of worship, overcoming “a deep-rooted suspicion of ‘formalism’”¹⁰³⁹ and using a “supportive, constructive role”¹⁰⁴⁰ of liturgical elements in the life of the church.

Freedom, like a powerful stream of water, should be put under control to bring blessings and encouragement, lest it is devastating. Thomas McKibbens phrases it as “an orderly openness

¹⁰³⁴ 1 Cor. 12:31.

¹⁰³⁵ McKibbens, “Our Baptist Heritage in Worship,” p. 60.

¹⁰³⁶ Christine Longhurst, “Worship Music: Varied Styles, A Common Goal,” *Direction*, vol. 22, no. 2 (Fall, 1993): 28.

¹⁰³⁷ Underhill, *Worship*, p. 298.

¹⁰³⁸ Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship*, p. 218.

¹⁰³⁹ Segler, *Christian Worship, Its Theology and Practice*, p. 178.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Ibid.

to the Spirit.”¹⁰⁴¹ In terms of frameworks for worship, a more serious attitude toward the Christian calendar in new Baptist churches might help to focus the attention of both preachers and congregations on Christ and God’s provision in salvation. Organization and planning can be good mediators for the spiritual gifts of Christians, so that they might be used in order to build up the church. As various commentators have argued, freedom works best within structure¹⁰⁴² and “spontaneity operates within some ordered framework.”¹⁰⁴³

This thesis likewise proposes that the practice of worship in Baptist churches should also reflect this rule. Firstly, prayerful work is needed/required in planning the service with respect to the sermons, singing, poems and testimonies, which ideally should be done a week or few days before the service.¹⁰⁴⁴ Certainly, planning does not have to be final in that it is open to the possibility of changing the plan at any time in any worship situation. As Bob Kauflin reminds us, “Planning can’t replace dependence on the Holy Spirit... Our goal should be to plan wisely, humbly, and prayerfully, fully expecting that God may provide fresh and unexpected guidance during the meeting.”¹⁰⁴⁵

Special attention should be given to the concept of “team,” which is sometimes lacking in traditional churches. A variety of team members may serve to boost the level of diversity in public worship, and the combined wisdom will reduce the risk of errors and compensate for the shortcomings of one person. For example, discussing the plan and content of sermons will help the preacher avoid subjectivity and personal preferences in choosing a topic, and to see the sermon as a part of the whole ministry of the Body. Interestingly, the churches that have adopted a contemporary style for worship pay more attention to team work and planning worship, which can take place a quarter or even half a year prior to the meeting.¹⁰⁴⁶

Limitation of freedom could be required even during public worship, if the church has previously had some negative experience of a particular person’s involvement, or when the time or topics of some components do not fit the worship very well.¹⁰⁴⁷ Moreover, in an emergency,

¹⁰⁴¹ McKibbens, “Our Baptist Heritage in Worship,” p. 57.

¹⁰⁴² Craig Douglas Erickson, *Participating in Worship. History, Theory, and Practice* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), p. 25.

¹⁰⁴³ Arthur J Rowe, “1 Corinthians 12-14: the use of a text for Christian worship,” *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 77.2 (2005): 120.

¹⁰⁴⁴ It is rather typical of the public worship at “Light of Gospel” church in Minsk, for example, that the pianist must search quickly for the music immediately after the pastor announces the forthcoming congregational song. Although the pastor usually announces the song twice and refers to two hymnals, which provides the pianist with additional time to find the music, delays sometimes occur. In churches “Grace of God,” Bobruisk, and “House of the Gospel,” Vitebsk, the songs are selected in the moment. In the latter church if the musician does not know the music for the song that the pastor has suggested, then the congregation sings it a cappella. (Personal notes, p. 66b.)

¹⁰⁴⁵ Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Learning Others to Encounter the Greatness of God*, p. 182.

¹⁰⁴⁶ “Pure Heart,” Brest; “Light of Hope,” “Light of Truth,” Minsk. The pastor of “Light of Hope” Church in Minsk might invite someone to be part of a certain worship service with a specific topic three to four months before the event. (Personal experience of the author [Personal notes, p. 66].)

¹⁰⁴⁷ In the practice of “Light of Gospel,” Minsk, the pastor occasionally does not pay attention to some requests to recite poems, especially when several people ask to do it.

the leader can even interrupt someone's prayer or witness. The former senior pastor in church in Fortechnaya 61/1, Brest, who ministered in the 1980s – early 1990s, used to cut short some particularly clumsy repeated prayers by his prayer or prayerful singing.¹⁰⁴⁸ In “House of the Gospel,” Vitebsk, the pastor says “Amen” in similar situations and concludes with his prayer.¹⁰⁴⁹ Undoubtedly, it is preferable to settle these issues in advance at the stage of planning by regulating and directing the energy of the people involved. However, openness of public worship to all church members could create a situation that still requires decisive intervention.

A proper understanding of this notion of orderly freedom reduces tension in worship. But this is not a one-way street. To achieve harmony in worship we can also reduce the emphasis on structure. An important assumption behind loosening structure is the supremacy of content (which is focused on Christ in the Baptist churches of Belarus – see section 5.2). Reformed theologian Robert Webber argues in his book, *Worship Old & New*¹⁰⁵⁰ that “The primary factor in worship concerns not the structure, nor the style, but the content. Judgment about a particular style of worship must be concerned chiefly with the content of the worship.”¹⁰⁵¹ J.J. von Allmen, who writes from a liturgical perspective, also points out that “liturgical forms are limited by the second commandment: “You shall not make yourself a graven image....”¹⁰⁵² He continues,

[liturgical forms] are limited by their inherent justification; they cease to be valid as soon as they seek their meaning and their justification in themselves, as soon as they are no longer content to be an echo of the offense and the appeal of the incarnation and seek to become a continued incarnation, to be in themselves as salvation rather than a means of transmitting a salvation accomplished once for all.¹⁰⁵³

Thus there is no need to be bound by forms in the planning and preparation and it is possible to change and even reject some forms just as Christ “refused to put the new wine of the gospel into old wineskins of tradition.”¹⁰⁵⁴ Following the example of the reformers, the special sacramental connection between a specific ritual and God's presence can be rejected.¹⁰⁵⁵ If the three or four sermon tradition quenches the Spirit, especially in the evenings or on holidays, it is possible to change the structure and miss one or two sermons and fill a service with singing in the Spirit. The format of Bible-study could replace part of public worship if some sermons do not

¹⁰⁴⁸ Personal notes, p. 64b.

¹⁰⁴⁹ “House of the Gospel,” Vitebsk. (Timofei Egorenkov, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 26 November 2015 [Personal notes, p. 64b].)

¹⁰⁵⁰ Webber, *Worship Old & New: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction*, pp. 149-151.

¹⁰⁵¹ Ibid., p. 149.

¹⁰⁵² Exod. 20:4.

¹⁰⁵³ Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, pp. 82-83.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Segler, *Christian Worship, Its Theology and Practice*, p. 177.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, p. 128.

edify the Christians, and indeed some churches are taking steps in this direction.¹⁰⁵⁶

However, a proper attitude to structure should offer something more than some external changes. Structure must be understood as an implicit agreement between the main group of worship participants and an internal logic of worship. It is the idea hidden behind the scene which becomes clear to worship participants and which directs and defines the following steps and inspires the content of worship. Such thinking usually works well in special evangelistic meetings which are aimed at “the conversion of sinners.” These meetings are characterized by the unity of topic, logical relationship of the elements, psychological chain from bad to Good News, the development and progress of the topic, a climax which calls to repentance, and every active participant understanding the ideas and meaning behind the structure. The experience of thematic and festive worship also proves that understanding the purpose and topic of worship, its internal logic (along with thorough preparation) helps to achieve unity, purpose and balanced combination of worship components, preserving the elements of improvisation in sermon, prayer or short testimonies.¹⁰⁵⁷

Another element where it is particularly important to combine form and freedom is that of prayer. Raymond Abba says that

“free prayer does not necessarily mean extemporary prayer, which is spontaneous and unpremeditated, springing directly out of the occasion (*ex tempore*). It may equally well mean what Isaac Watts calls ‘conceived prayer,’ that is, prayer which is carefully prepared by the minister in advance.”¹⁰⁵⁸

For this reason, Isaac Watts recommended that two extremes in prayer should be avoided. “On the one hand, we should avoid ‘confining ourselves entirely to pre-composed forms of prayer’ and, on the other, be wary of ‘entire dependence on sudden motions and suggestions of thought’.”¹⁰⁵⁹ He interprets “extempore prayer” as what happens “when we, without any reflection or meditation beforehand, address ourselves to God, and speak the thoughts of our hearts, as fast as we conceive them.” From this he makes the following distinction between

¹⁰⁵⁶ Thus “Bethlehem” Church in Minsk reduced the morning worship service to 40-50 minutes by offering Bible study in groups to supplement the shorter service. Church members are divided into three groups in Bible study according to age: younger than 28; 28-50; 50 and older. Children and teenagers have separate classes. (Jacob Timofeev, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 16 October 2015 [Personal notes, p. 64].)

¹⁰⁵⁷ In this regard, Morgan Noyes also points out the danger of a too narrow representation of the theme, as “if every hymn and every prayer center too directly in the same thought, the service as a whole loses a richness which it may rightfully claim.” (Morgan Phelps Noeys, *Preaching the Word of God* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943], p. 179.) Paul Hoon also warns that too close topical ties of the elements lead to a state where “the worshipper is theologically and psychologically overwhelmed” (Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship*, p. 279.)

¹⁰⁵⁸ Raymond Abba, *Principles of Christian Worship* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 115.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Isaac Watts, “A Guide to Prayer; or a Free and Rational Account of the Grace and Spirit of Prayer with Plain Directions how Every Christian may Attain Them,” in *The Works of the Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D.*, ed. J. Doddridge, ed (London: J. Barfield, 1715): p. 125.

“conceived” or “free” prayer:

When we have not the words of our prayer formed beforehand, to direct our thoughts, but we conceive the matter or substance of our address to God, first in our minds, and then put those conceptions in such words and expressions as we think most proper.¹⁰⁶⁰

Ellis, commenting on Isaac Watts’ ideas of conceived prayer, observes that “conceived prayer may not involve a detailed working out of what will be uttered in public, but should include what he describes as ‘premeditation’ involving the preparation of the heart as well as a reflection on the subjects for prayer.”¹⁰⁶¹

Carefully thought out prayer may represent a middle ground between written prayer and the kind of extempore prayer that may not edify the congregation. Meaningful and rich prayers, recorded in Psalms, together with the prayers of David (1 Chron. 17:16-27), Solomon (1 Kings 8:23-53), Isaiah (25:1-5), Paul (Eph. 3:14-21) and Christ (Matt. 6:9-13; John 17) become a model of depth and motivation to serious preparation for the prayer ministry. *Prayer*, a book by Karl Barth which has been translated into Russian and consists a lot of his prayers may also act as a model for ministers’ prayers in worship.¹⁰⁶² Preliminary meditation would enrich the themes and content of prayer, which will in turn contribute to the edifying function of prayer and the general improvement of prayer quality within the church. As with the advantages of conceived and freely delivered sermons, meditation and preparation help to put prayer in the most appropriate forms as “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets,”¹⁰⁶³ and freedom allows the context to influence the content of a prayer to make it more relevant and natural.

Combining freedom and form in prayer is also possible in a local context by suggesting topics for prayer. The Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists in the Republic of Belarus sends out a monthly prayer letter to churches, calling for prayer both in corporate worship and in homes on certain topics (about peace, church, faithfulness, etc.), presenting the needs of churches and departments of the Union (prayer for children’s camps, youth convention, thankfulness for baptism services, etc.) and Baptist churches of other countries. The wording of the topic focuses the prayer, and at the same time, teach prayer expresses gratitude and request in a free manner.

The unique role of worship from the historical point of view, respect of older believers for traditions and forms complicates the process of change, and the continuing confrontation

¹⁰⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶¹ Ellis, *Gathering*, pp. 107-108. This resonates with Harold Best's idea, when he proposes a “composition and improvisation” model for worship instead of a “fixity-spontaneity dilemma.” (Harold Best, “A Traditional Worship Response,” in, *Exploring the Worship Spectrum*, ser. ed. Paul E. Engle and Paul A. Basden [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004], pp. 37-38.)

¹⁰⁶² Karl Barth, *Molitva [Prayer]* (Moskva: Bibleysko-Bogoslovskiy Institut sv. Apostola Andrey, 2010).

¹⁰⁶³ 1 Cor. 14:32.

between the Orthodox context and Western sources remain important factors in sustaining the present tensions. However, understanding the paramount importance of content and consideration of theological emphases, especially the focus on Christ and evangelism allows to go beyond form. Thus, striving for balance, expressed in mutual concessions of form and freedom, or controlled freedom can provide meaningful content to the entire congregation.

***8.1.2. Freedom and forms in a creative tension*¹⁰⁶⁴**

However, the problem of the relationship of freedom and form in traditional public worship cannot be solved once and for all because it originates in the very nature of public worship itself. Since “God is spirit,”¹⁰⁶⁵ Christian—or at least, Baptist—worship is essentially free, and forms may from time to time come into conflict with freedom in houses of prayer. This is only the continuation of an ancient dispute. Evelyn Underhill reminds us that “ordered” and “free” worship “both present in the primitive Church.” Underhill goes on to argue that “both are needed if the full span and possibilities of Christian worship are to be realized; and it is one of the many tragedies of Church history that they have so often been regarded as hostile to one another...”¹⁰⁶⁶

Yet, both are related to the nature of worship and both are needed for a “mature worship.”¹⁰⁶⁷ Both traditions can be found in the history of Russian-speaking Baptists (although their encounter in worship was not always peaceful) and they are now represented to various degrees in Baptist churches in Belarus.

However, even if they may not be regarded as openly hostile to each other, in the light of our imperfect understanding and practice, these concepts remain in constant tension, a tension that is not necessarily fully soluble. These kinds of tensions in religious life involve “the dialectic of the sacred and the secular, of the supernatural and the natural, of the eternal and the temporal, of the trans-historical and historical.”¹⁰⁶⁸ In terms of freedom and forms, when they operate with mutual respect, they can together choose the direction. Forms are needed for overview and stability,¹⁰⁶⁹ to provide solemnity and ceremony, as with weddings and the blessing of children, and combine the religious and aesthetic.¹⁰⁷⁰ At the same time spontaneous and extempore elements must not be excluded from Christian worship, because the Spirit can act

¹⁰⁶⁴ See Ellis, “Gathering Struggles: Creative Tensions in Baptist Worship.”

¹⁰⁶⁵ John 4:24.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Underhill, *Worship*, pp. 110-111. Here once again we could remember the negative and even hostile attitude of the Evangelicals to the Orthodox Church in the early stages of worship formation (See this thesis, section 4.2.2. The shaping of worship in opposition to the Orthodoxy).

¹⁰⁶⁷ Abernethy, *A New Look for Sunday Morning*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship*, p. 125.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Gnida, “Poryadok provedeniya bogosluzhenii v tserkvakh evangel’skih khristian-baptistov,” p. 71.

¹⁰⁷⁰ On necessity of forms see Peck, *Living Worship*, p. 22; Shepherd, *The Worship of the Church*, pp. 51, 54; Segler, *Christian Worship, Its Theology and Practice*, p. 181.

in a special way at a particular time. Here we turn again to prayer as illustrative.¹⁰⁷¹ Ellis reminds that “The *ad hoc* nature of this [extempore] prayer enables it to be the prayer of *this* local church, the needs and aspirations of *this* group of people on *this* particular day.”¹⁰⁷² Hence these contradictions and tensions can be called productive, “creative tensions;”¹⁰⁷³ they are important for the viability of a public worship that is helpfully structured and directed but with sufficient diversity and flexibility in the forms it chooses to preserve the spontaneity and richness of prayer and worship.¹⁰⁷⁴

The tension can be regulated to some extent or even overcome in terms of some specific actions although it is impossible to achieve complete harmony. But surely the conflict of freedom and form in public worship is an area that should be worked on. Basic preparation, discussion and organization done in the spirit of freedom, should make public worship more effective. Church ministers may not achieve ideal worship in their churches, but might find a way of worship that is best suited to the needs of their particular church and which would be able to embrace freedom and order, individualism and the communal nature of worship, openness and the mysteriousness of public worship.

At the same time in public worship, it is important that freedom and forms are not understood as rivals; rather they are allies, heading in one direction, and cannot be separated: “The paradoxical truth is that form assumes and fosters freedom as freedom begets and requires form.”¹⁰⁷⁵ The creative tension itself adds freshness and life into worship. This is a kind of perpetual motion in worship which helps to change, grow, transform, and develop worship. Embracing the tension keeps worship from solidification, from rigid tradition, and also from confusion and the chaos of laxity. This blessing of uncertainty, in the relation between freedom and forms, helps a worship service to adapt to context and situation, enriches it with new forms and components, involves more participants in worship, while key elements such as the central place of the Bible, Christocentrism and the principle of edification, keep us on track. “Worship benefits from modes of ritual and prophesy and enjoys predictability as well as surprise, composition and improvisation, familiarity and newness, the habitual and the fresh, corporate and individual creativity.”¹⁰⁷⁶ Thus Paul’s concept of worship as expressed in his prescriptions “Do not quench the Spirit,” and “Let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner”¹⁰⁷⁷—two verses that are frequently quoted in the Belarusian Baptist context—is an invitation to a further development of this creative dynamic.

¹⁰⁷¹ See footnotes 1058, 1059, 1060 and 1061.

¹⁰⁷² Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 124. (Emphases in original).

¹⁰⁷³ Ellis, “Gathering Struggles: Creative Tensions in Baptist Worship,” p. 8.

¹⁰⁷⁴ John Macquarrie, *Christian Theology*, rev. ed. (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1977), p. 499.

¹⁰⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Erickson, *Participating in Worship*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁷⁷ 1 Thess. 5:19. 1 Cor. 14:40.

8.2. Individual and communal aspects of worship

8.2.1. Priesthood of all believers in relation to worship

Understanding the interaction of freedom and form in worship makes further work of reconciliation between individual and communal aspects of worship easier. Here we follow the method tested in the previous section, putting forward the following thesis: tension between the individual and corporate character of worship may be alleviated with a proper understanding and clarification of the nature of the church and public worship, along with a number of practical ways of adjusting the concept of priesthood with regard to worship. An individual does not disappear within the community, because “each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation”¹⁰⁷⁸ and worship offers some orderly opportunity to serve each other for church edification and His glory.¹⁰⁷⁹ At the same time, “[c]orporate worship is naturally communal, even though it may sometimes be corrupted by individualism, passivity or dysfunctional leadership.”¹⁰⁸⁰

A variety of gifts enriches worship and invests in the spiritual growth of participants. Yet, the use of gifts is associated with certain risks; in light of the imperfection of the members of the body, some internal tension is unavoidable. Thus, the apostle Paul calls the church to maintain order in gathering together and shows how individuality can effectively participate in building the church. Key to this is the necessity for participants to understand the nature of the Church as one Body. Elizabeth Newman warns:

As long as the church is secondary to Baptist self-understanding, then the priesthood of the believer will remain a description primarily of the individual, and worship will be understood primarily as that which takes places between an individual and God.¹⁰⁸¹

Every member is to understand themselves as an interdependent part of a whole. Here in the church, it is not isolated individuals but a fellowship of believers – *sobranie* (congregational gathering), as believers in Belarus often indicate the time of worship - that comes into His presence, although, at the same time, each gives account of themselves to God.¹⁰⁸² This

¹⁰⁷⁸ 1 Cor. 14:26. Thus we reaffirm the “participation of the whole congregation” (Constance M. Cherry, “Merging Tradition and Innovation in the Life of the Church,” in *The Conviction of Things Not Seen: Worship and Ministry in the 21st Century*, ed. Todd E. Johnson [Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002], p. 22).

¹⁰⁷⁹ Col. 3:17.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Ellis, *Gathering*, p. vii.

¹⁰⁸¹ Newman, “The Priesthood of All Believers and the Necessity of the Church,” p. 63.

¹⁰⁸² Rom. 14:12.

“indivisible and unmerged” state determines the relationship of the individual with the group and with God.

Understanding the church as one body helps to understand the essence of corporate worship. The whole body and its members worship the Lord. The subjective experience of individuals is tested and interpreted in the community; even private worship is tested in the worship of the church. Brian Haymes’ explanation of the Baptist way of doing theology is appropriate with respect to worship:

The emphasis I have laid on enquiry ‘together’ is not without significance. The church is gathered by God, lives in and by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and is nourished by word and sacraments. It exists as a community, a gathered community that together seeks the mind of Christ. A Baptist way of doing theology is therefore unashamedly confessional and collegiate. The corporate nature of the church questions any models that are individualistic and unaccountable, a fact that has implications for our understanding of ministry and ordination. We bring our theological reflections to the test of others, and not just other theologians, but the whole people of God. The Baptist theologian is accountable not only to her academic peers but also to the gathered church.¹⁰⁸³

Likewise, in worship every participant understands that they do not perform in a recital when they preach, pray, witness, or sing. Each component is an integral part of the symphonic orchestra of praise in which each individual has a part that is related to the total score. Certainly, participants do not deny their individuality. In fact, each individual in corporate worship actualizes himself as “a corporate and social creature,”¹⁰⁸⁴ and, what is more important, as a member of one body. Without the body, one member as such cannot fulfill their destination in congregational worship, but the full participation of that one member does not contradict the complete corporate participation.

With this in mind, participants comprehend the difference between public and personal worship, between communal prayer, such as in the house of prayer where dozens or even hundreds of people gather for worship, and personal prayer, perhaps in a closed room. Belarusian pastors often encourage church members to pray during worship, but very rarely explain that communal prayer requires social cooperation, and a certain limitation of opportunities for participation.¹⁰⁸⁵ One of the past leaders of AUCECB, Zhidkov, recommended that

everyone say their personal prayers before God in their homes, while during worship, if such a prayer is said these days, it should be done by a worship leader, namely the pastor of the church, who will think over the words of his public prayer in front of God before saying it, so that it may have edifying value for the listeners who will pray along with this prayer, and comply fully with the apostolic directions.¹⁰⁸⁶

¹⁰⁸³ Haymes, “Theology and Baptist identity,” p. 4.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Michael B. Aune, “The Corporate and Confessional Character of Worship: The Common Service Debate,” *Word & World* 8/1 (1988): 32.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg and Mark Thiessen Nation, *Virtues&Practices in the Christian Tradition, Christian Ethics after MacIntyre* (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), p. 33.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Zhidkov, “Nashi prazdniki,” p. 15.

What, therefore, does it mean to participate in public worship? Baptists in Belarus speak about “participation in the service,” referring to active and direct individual participation like preaching, singing, spoken prayers, and so on in order “to fulfill the Scripture, to follow the apostolic church, and to help people to grow in Christ.”¹⁰⁸⁷ But it is possible to make some initial evaluation of participation on the basis of the level of the member’s involvement. Some have direct individual participation when they preach, pray aloud, sing a solo, play a musical instrument, witness, or even decorations, symbols, texts in the sanctuary to edify the congregation. Some members are involved in group participation within a choir, ensemble, or orchestra, or when a group of people perform drama or recite poetry. Corporate congregational participation occurs when the entire congregation has opportunities to respond and to praise the Lord, whether that is by joining in public singing, or jointly affirming prayers, exclaiming “Praise to God,” or repeating (occasionally) “Blessings...”¹⁰⁸⁸

Yet participation is not limited by visible or verbal involvement in worship. As Simon Chan observes, “active participation is possible if the people understand what is going on, are inwardly prepared and are able to use their gifts in the worship service.”¹⁰⁸⁹ On the other hand, silent or immobile participation can be just as meaningful. Active listening or silent prayer are good examples of such kind of participation. James White, a Methodist liturgical historian, suggests the term “passive participation” alongside the active. If active participation “refers to those worship activities in which the members of the congregation engage outwardly, such as singing, open prayer or the offering,” then “passive participation refers to those activities in which the congregation is not observably ‘doing’ something, such as listening to the sermon or being led in prayer by a representative.”¹⁰⁹⁰ A similar idea was expressed by Mitskevich, one of the authors of *Bratskiy Vestnik*. He instructs believers in how they should listen to sermons:

Be watchful, open the ears of your heart hear and reflect. Be like Mary at Jesus’ feet, place in your heart the seeds of eternal life. Do not sleep or doze, so that the evil one would not steal the seed planted in your heart (Matt. 13:19). Do not let your heart become a transit road for various unclean or vain thought. Find the pearl in what was said, wonderful truths, draw lessons not only for others, but also for your personal life. Do not set your heart for criticism or judgement.¹⁰⁹¹

¹⁰⁸⁷ SI, 2008.

¹⁰⁸⁸ 2 Cor. 13:14. One could refer here to the parallel that exists in the African-American tradition (or in Belarus in Pentecostal circles), where such exclamations (plus “Alleluia”) are an even more significant part of the worship experience.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), p. 152.

¹⁰⁹⁰ White, “Protestant Worship,” pp. 17ff., cited in Ellis, “Understanding Worship: Trends and Criteria,” p. 38.

¹⁰⁹¹ A. I. Mitskevich, “Vseobshcheye sviashchenstvo I sluzhiteli tserkvi” [Priesthood of All Believers and Church Ministers], *Bratskiy Vestnik*, no. 3 (1965): 30-31.

Participation is not limited by individual or group activities; it is a ministry of the congregation as a whole. Such a definition does not exclude individual or group involvement, but instead gives value to the communal activities as a whole, and extends comprehension even of “listening” as a way to participate in public worship. Although the idea of silent participation is not developed in the churches of Belarus, we must pay tribute to the preachers who often urge to be ready “to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice.”¹⁰⁹²

A biblical understanding of the concept of priesthood is also essential here. In the context of the ministry of the Baptist churches in Belarus, the teaching of the priesthood of all believers comes primarily from the denial of the teaching and practice of the Orthodox Church, but the positive aspect has not been developed deeply enough. Frank Rees, an Australian Baptist, draws attention to the difference between the priesthood of each believer and the priesthood of all believers. In the church we have a collective, communal priesthood.¹⁰⁹³ This emphasis on the body does not deny individual participation in worship but encourages harmonizing personal activity with the corporate one. Yet priesthood may be attributed to every believer in terms of relationship with God and personal access to God through a High Priest, Jesus, so every person can come to God during worship in loud or silent prayer in an orderly manner.¹⁰⁹⁴ Then, ‘New Testament priests’ are to offer up spiritual sacrifices, and the time of worship provides these opportunities. Of course the priesthood of all believers not only bears on worship, but on all Christian life, “not only *leitourgia* but also *diakonia*,” “sharing and loving deeds, – gifts of money, evangelistic endeavor, and holy living.”¹⁰⁹⁵ However public worship gives a unique opportunity to express an individual priesthood in the context of communal priesthood, when we remember that the priesthood of all does not imply equal participation or “autonomous individualism.”¹⁰⁹⁶ It should be understood in a wider ecclesiastical context.

A robust theology of gifts is fundamental in terms of communal involvement in public worship. Although the topic of gifts is occasionally raised in congregations, there is seldom any mention of the application of this teaching in the practice of worship. Yet, the Apostle’s teaching about worship order in Corinth also applies today. Paul explains:

All are not apostles are they? All are not prophets are they? All are not teachers are they? All are not workers of miracles are they? All do not have gifts of healings do they? All do not speak with tongues do

¹⁰⁹² Eccl. 5:1.

¹⁰⁹³ Rees, “The Worship of all believers,” pp. 179-180.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Rees identifies the priesthood as “the quality which enables a man to come before God to gain his grace, and therefore fellowship with him, by offering up a sacrifice acceptable to him.” He continues with this statement: “The priesthood of all believers is about the life of the whole church as worship, in which we all have both a gift and a calling.” (Rees, “The Worship of all believers,” p. 176.)

¹⁰⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 180-181. Rees calls these “*the gathered life* of the church and *the dispersed life* of the church” (Ibid., p. 183.)

¹⁰⁹⁶ Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity*, p. 218.

they? All do not interpret do they?”¹⁰⁹⁷

In a Belarusian Baptist community the question could be rephrased, “All are not preachers are they? All are not singers are they? All do not pray out loud in public worship do they? All do not lead the public worship, do they? ...” Of course, in small churches this argument is difficult to apply in the absence of potential preachers or musicians, where the audience welcomes any brother coming to the pulpit and leading worship; in such churches, however, members have moderate expectations for preaching or singing. In church, they are encouraged by the fellowship with brothers and sisters, the mere presence around His Word in the “house of the Lord,” and the opportunity to be involved in worship and glorify the Lord. Yet the discussion of gifts is quite appropriate in most churches;¹⁰⁹⁸ both big and small churches prefer edifying and inspiring involvement to “the blind, lame and sick.”¹⁰⁹⁹

8.2.2. Towards a disciplined participation

A theological understanding of the worship of the church in relation to the priesthood lays a firm basis for holding a creative tension between individual and corporate aspects of worship. The concept of the “body” requires limiting or rather disciplining individuals and strengthening the corporate elements of worship, so that “the freedom of some does not destroy the worship of others.”¹¹⁰⁰ As Christopher Ellis puts it, “we need to be clear that this freedom in worship is not our human freedom to assert our autonomy but God’s freedom to direct our worship in proportion to our openness to the Spirit’s leading.”¹¹⁰¹ There is something significant about bringing whatever each one has prepared for worship,¹¹⁰² but all these “offerings” serve the building up of the church.¹¹⁰³ Individuality submits or adapt to the community, which is the first step to overcoming the tension between individual and communal aspects of worship.¹¹⁰⁴

Thus, churches develop disciplined participation.¹¹⁰⁵ Those who participate follow standards in terms of time, topic, and content of worship. For this purpose the apprentice preachers in “Light of Truth,” Minsk, who have just begun their preaching career, provide full-text sermons ahead of time (a unique phenomenon in Belarusian churches); in some churches the

¹⁰⁹⁷ 1 Cor. 29:30.

¹⁰⁹⁸ SI, 2012.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Mal. 1:8.

¹¹⁰⁰ Ellis, “Gathering Struggles: Creative Tensions in Baptist Worship,” p. 13.

¹¹⁰¹ Ellis, “Understanding Worship: Trends and Criteria,” p. 38.

¹¹⁰² 1 Cor. 14:26.

¹¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁴ At the same time, churches provide other opportunities for the implementation of gifts. Some new churches which practice a contemporary style of worship encourage members to gather into small groups where brothers and sisters encourage each other with their gifts, and where they encourage developing their gifts in discipleship, counseling, evangelism and charity. (“New Earth,” Minsk; “Pure Heart,” Brest [SI, 2012].)

¹¹⁰⁵ Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, p. 155.

texts of poems and songs are agreed with the worship leader.¹¹⁰⁶ Worship leaders should be aware of the level of skill and preparation of those who wish to be involved in preaching, singing or reciting poetry.

Michael Green offers seven questions which may help churches and individuals to evaluate the components in worship. Questions rate content and manner of presentation, as well as the personal qualities of the participant. In the local context, this should be supplemented by an assessment of the quality of the material and preparation. The goal of such questions should be primarily the improvement of quality, rather than looking to ban elements:

1) Does it glorify God rather than the speaker, church, or denomination? 2) Does it accord with Scripture? 3) Does it build up the church? 4) Is it spoken in love? 5) Does the speaker submit him- or herself to the judgment and consensus of others in spiritual humility? 6) Is the speaker in control of him- or herself? 7) Is there a reasonable amount of instruction, or does the message seem excessive in detail?¹¹⁰⁷

To overcome the tension between individual and communal character of worship, churches must also give adequate attention to corporate activities, in order to involve as many people as possible in active worship. Here Robert Webber's analysis of evangelical worship in the States may be helpful when we think about some Baptist services in medium and large sized churches in Belarus.

[E]vangelicals will be challenged in the matter of participation. I find evangelical worship to be passive and uninvolving. The worshiper sits, listens, and absorbs. But seldom does the worshiper respond. As in the medieval period, worship has been taken away from the people. It must be returned. Participation will be recovered as the dramatic sense of worship is restored.¹¹⁰⁸

Mark Dever and Paul Alexander turn to congregational singing in this regard and warn that

continual singing by soloists or even by the choir can have the unintended effect of underestimating the nature of communal musical worship in which everybody is involved. People can gradually come to believe that worship is a passive contemplation, while in the Bible we find no evidence for that.¹¹⁰⁹

Congregational singing, as compared to all other elements except, perhaps, the Lord's Supper, serves to better reflect the communal nature of worship, to express more aptly the idea

¹¹⁰⁶ "House of the Gospel," Vitebsk; "Hope," Gomel. (Timofei Egorenkov and Igor Gritsenko, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 26 November 2015 [Personal notes, p. 79].)

¹¹⁰⁷ Michael Green, *To Corinth with Love* (Waco: World Books Publishers, 1988), pp. 77-78.

¹¹⁰⁸ Robert E. Webber, "An Evangelical and Catholic Methodology," in., *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options*, ed. Robert K. Johnston (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), chapter 8, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=14>, last accessed 26 January 2011.

¹¹⁰⁹ Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *Produmannoye sozidaniye tserkvi: sluzheniye, osnovannoye na Evangelii* [Thoughtful Building of the Church: A Ministry Based on the Gospel] (Minsk: "Printcorp"/Slavyanskoye evangel'skoye obshchestvo, 2009), p. 113. Originally published as *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005).

of a royal priesthood as well as “the catholic nature of the Church,”¹¹¹⁰ to unite diverse believers into one Body, to connect different generations, and to eliminate a conflict between the communal and the individual aspects of worship. Here I strongly support Ellis' emphasis on singing. He claims that hymns are an important form in articulating “corporate acts of praise, corporate prayer and corporate confessions of faith.”¹¹¹¹ In congregational singing believers “actively and concertedly” participate in worship.¹¹¹² Singing allows the community to express itself as a whole, unites in spirit, “encourages a sense of belonging and community.”¹¹¹³ Taking part in the congregational singing, everyone present feels and acts as a part of the worship.¹¹¹⁴ Therefore, congregational singing should be considered an integral part of the worship service, “for each redeemed soul coming to this Lord’s church not only wants to listen, but also longs to sing themselves praising their Savior.”¹¹¹⁵

It must be acknowledged that a lot of attention is paid to congregational singing in traditional worship. However, this element can be strengthened by continually updating the repertoire. Other elements such as corporate prayer (particularly the Lord's Prayer), joint public reading of the Bible or Creed will also enhance the possibilities of participation of the entire church.

In addition, personal investment of time, energy and thinking by those who lead worship is required. Peter Fink says that even “Christian prayer cannot be simply a public act without some personal investment on the part of the ‘actors’ in what they do, and without personal vulnerability to what they do.”¹¹¹⁶ Therefore, in caring for the communal character of public worship, it is important to preserve its individuality because individuality also has an appropriate place within the presence of God, and the individual and communal do not abolish or negate one another. As Geoffrey Wainwright says, “Christian religion is neither an atomistic affair of isolated individuals nor yet a totalitarian collectivism, in which individual identity and responsibilities are submerged. It is rather a case of members integrated into a body.”¹¹¹⁷

These clarifications in teaching, especially about the church as one body, and thinking as well as an emphasis on disciplined participation and corporate actions can reduce the tension but they can affect spontaneity and introduce some formality into worship. An excess of discipline, orderliness, and predictability can produce monotony and boredom. To keep its openness and freedom, Baptist worship should not go too far in any direction. “The dialectic of the body and

¹¹¹⁰ Krasovitskaya, *Liturgica*, p. 6.

¹¹¹¹ Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 152.

¹¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹⁴ B. K., “O muzyke i penii,” p. 67.

¹¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹⁶ Peter E. Fink, “Public and Private Moments in Christian Prayer,” *Worship*, 58 (1984): 492-493.

¹¹¹⁷ Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life*, p. 142.

the individual member, of Church and person...must not be unbalanced nor collapsed.”¹¹¹⁸ Quality of performance and depth of content enhance edification but edification is not the only goal of the meeting. The Church does not forget about the principles of simplicity or sincerity, which allow for non-professional, organic participation in acts of worship. In fact, spontaneous participation can be more inspirational and edifying than a prepared and rehearsed sermon.¹¹¹⁹ The body is not a frozen structure and better organization, planning, and preparation cannot solve all its problems. Such objective reasons as the lack of trained preachers or musicians, as well as limited talents, skills, experience and education are reflected in the imperfection of sermons, singing, prayers, and poems; embracing these requires humility, patience, encouragement and love towards each other. Progress in respect to these Christian virtues can also be interpreted as an unintended, positive consequence of the (imperfect) worship, where individual and communal aspects in their interaction produce viability, vitality, and openness.

8.3. The Relevance of worship to the secular environment

8.3.1. *Inculturation: pro and contra*

Conflicts in relation to forms and participants are not the only ones that are to be held in tension. Another point of tension, specified by the context of formation and requiring overcoming, is that between the worship of the church and the culture within which the church lives. To describe this task I use the term “inculturation”— “the dynamic relation between the Christian message and the culture,”¹¹²⁰ or “the Church's efforts to make the message of Christ penetrate a given sociocultural milieu, calling on the latter to grow according to all its particular values, as long as these are compatible with the Gospel.”¹¹²¹

Inculturation does not necessarily require transformation of the currently established forms of traditional Baptist worship where those forms are in harmony with the local culture and traditions, for example, in some villages where there are almost no young people, and where the average age of residents and church members is nearing sixty or seventy.¹¹²² Traditional forms also appeal to all people of various ages who perceive the service as a refuge from the world and its culture (see section 2.2.). In David Brown’s observation, “traditional worship has great value

¹¹¹⁸ Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship*, p. 104.

¹¹¹⁹ 1 Cor. 14:29-30.

¹¹²⁰ Lukken, *Ritual in Abundance*, p. 182.

¹¹²¹ “Faith and Inculturation.” International Theological Commission (1988), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1988_fede-inculturazione_en.html, last accessed 16 May 2019. For comparison with terms like “indigenization” and “adaptation” see Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 677.

¹¹²² Churches in Liubiacha, Bol’shaya Ganuta, Zabashevichi, Lesovniya, Yakshitsy, Minsk region in 2012. (Author observation [Personal notes, p. 80].)

when it provides a safe haven from the pain and perils of an oppressive or confusing world.”¹¹²³ Acceleration of the rhythm of life, information overflow and technification of the society contribute to the popularity of disconnecting forms of worship from the present, seeing them then become places of rest from noise and hurry of big cities.¹¹²⁴ In fact, the evangelical Baptist movement ensured its long life by hiding in subculture and by abstention from social and cultural processes.¹¹²⁵

Moreover, it is vital to preserve traditional church culture in terms of outreach in the Orthodox context (see section 4.2.). Such forms allow churches to attract people who have been raised in the Orthodox understanding of the church but who have not found answers to their spiritual questions there and who are ready to be part of evangelical tradition. In fact, various forms of service are relevant for various people; the relevance is not always related to novelty of language and use of modern technologies. Ministers and church members alike indicate that the most important things they value are humility, openness, kindness, care and love for others, compassion, exemplary lives of believers, and the importance of revealing emotion, warmth, and simplicity in the presentation of the Gospel.¹¹²⁶

One also has to consider the situation of inculturation being reduced to primitive imitation and speculative reflection of culture.¹¹²⁷ This has been true in relation to some churches in Belarus, where in attempts to overcome the communication problem faced by traditional public worship and make worship relevant, they have just copied popular culture. A worship meeting may take the form of a pop concert, where the worship participants imitate the conduct and appearance of artists on the stage, including styles of clothing which would be inappropriate in a traditional meeting, dyed hair for men, the use of youth slang such as “mega-cool” and “cool” replacing the archaic “blessed” and “edifying,” and disco-type lighting.¹¹²⁸ Thoughtless, rather than creative borrowing, and reductionism in terms of the content and different layers of the worship service during the adaptation process, would impoverish rather than enrich the gathering of believers.¹¹²⁹ Such practice can lead to extremes, which James Hitchcock calls “the

¹¹²³ Brown, *Transformational Preaching*, p. 64.

¹¹²⁴ Susan White points to an interesting phenomenon, when “recently evangelized people have been unwilling to allow their native culture to be incorporated into the practice of their new-found faith. They wish to put away all vestiges of their pre-Christian past, and embark upon a fresh course; they wish to practice a form of Christianity which is ‘untainted’ by elements of their culture.” (Susan J. White, *Groundwork of Christian Worship* [Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2000], p. 188.)

¹¹²⁵ Mikhail Cherenkov, “Evangel’skaya vera v postateisticheskikh soobshchestvakh” [Evangelical Belief in Post Atheistic Communities] *The Christian Community in Russia: a Critical Self-Analysis with the Background of Spiritual Situation of the Time*, Roundtable Materials, April 27, 2007 (Moskva: Assotsiatsiya “Dukhovnoye vozrozhdeniye,” 2007): 14.

¹¹²⁶ SI, 2012.

¹¹²⁷ James F. White, “Worship and Culture: Mirror or Beacon?” *Theological Studies*, 35 no. 2 (Jan. 1974): 288.

¹¹²⁸ Youth gathering in “Light of Truth,” Minsk, 1 November 2012. I participated in the worship. (Personal notes, p. 80.)

¹¹²⁹ For example, in the recent ten to fifteen years, contemporary worship is becoming more common in

Harvey Cox syndrome.”¹¹³⁰ He gives an example of such a radical secularization where “the most notorious cases were the coffee-and-doughnut or beer-and-pretzel Eucharists, the gatherings where *agape* moved aside to admit *eros*, and the groups who used marijuana to stimulate ‘religious experiences’.” Hitchcock concludes:

The more the Eucharist is secularized to make it relevant, the more it is robbed of its meaning and the less likely it is to endure, except as a residual tie with tradition for persons who are reluctant to make themselves completely post-Christian.¹¹³¹

Christopher Ellis is similarly concerned that

if relevance becomes the dominant value, then church identity may be at risk which, in turn, will threaten its actual relevance. If identity is safeguarded at the cost of relevance, then even that identity is put at risk.¹¹³²

“The so called Chimera of Relevance,”¹¹³³ a desire “of finding or inventing a worship more acceptable, more ‘relevant’ to the modern man’s [sic] secular world view,” could lead to worship turning to express “the needs and aspirations of the secular man [sic], or even better, of secularism itself,”¹¹³⁴ but it will be robbed of its essence, and worship finds itself absorbed by the culture.¹¹³⁵ Belarusian Baptists would also benefit from both positive and negative experiences of models of inculturation in the West. In the 1980s and 1990s in churches such as Willow Creek, seeker-sensitive worship attracted nonbelievers but it is questionable whether it brought the desired effect in the long run. “For all the money, time, and effort we’ve spent on ... culturally relevant worship,” Sally Morgenthaler, an innovator in worship practices and founder of Worship Evangelism Concepts, writes, “it seems we came through the last 15 years with a significant net loss in churchgoers.”¹¹³⁶

On the other hand, consistent rejection or fear of changes leads to the neglect of reality, escapes “from history into liturgy,”¹¹³⁷ and (going back to theological emphasis on evangelism)

Belarusian churches where there is one style of music, one form of praise band accompanying congregational singing, one kind praise and worship songs, and usually only *forte* and *fortissimo* volume. This kind of worship tends to be rather poor in terms of art and culture.

¹¹³⁰ Hitchcock, *The Recovery of the Sacred*, p. 22.

¹¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 28, 33.

¹¹³² Ellis, “Gathering Struggles: Creative Tensions in Baptist Worship,” p. 6.

¹¹³³ Hitchcock, *The Recovery of the Sacred*, p. 17.

¹¹³⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, “Worship in A Secular Age,” in *For the Life of the World* by Alexander Schmemmann, p. 119.

¹¹³⁵ Ronald P. Byars, *The Future of Protestant Worship: Beyond the Worship Wars* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 18.

¹¹³⁶ Sally Morgenthaler, “Worship Evangelism: Sally Morgenthaler Rethinks Her Own Paradigm,” *Rev!* (May/June 2007): 50.

¹¹³⁷ Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life*, p. 407.

David Peck states in this regard that as a result of the separation of worship and everyday life they both suffer: worship “becomes remote, disembodied,” “and life becomes formless, without content, meaning or purpose,

surely impinges on the ability to communicate Good News. The consequence of such an approach, as in the case of Orthodox churches, Wainwright calls “liturgical escapism.”¹¹³⁸ Catholic theologian Charles Davis defines such meetings as a “Ghetto.”¹¹³⁹ Such danger also exists for traditional Belarusian Baptist worship practice when it reacts against any new appropriation of culture and turns itself into “a conservation area.”¹¹⁴⁰ But the extremes must not serve as the ground for rejecting the need to change. This need is recognized by a number of reputable ministers both in traditional Baptist churches in Belarus and other Russian-speaking communities experiencing similar problems. At the Pastoral Conference of the Union of Baptist Churches in Ukraine, held in Kiev on March 15-16, 2012, while discussing the relevance of the sermon topic one elderly pastor admitted: “We were taught to speak from the heart. We speak from the heart, but the youth does not understand us.”¹¹⁴¹ Analyzing the situation, the leadership of the Baptist Union of Russia made this recommendation:

It is no secret that the prayer meetings in many communities of Evangelical Christians-Baptists do not correspond to any needs either of believers or of contemporary life. Numerous shallow sermons, prolonged and sad songs, absence of spiritual enthusiasm repel rather than attract young people to Baptist churches. The search for new, effective, dynamic, contributing to an atmosphere of spiritual optimism forms of worship is not a charismatic deviation itself. Any new initiative to improve the quality of service should not be labeled as “charismatic.” On the liturgical assembly there can and should be a place for healthy positive emotions. What matters is that everything should be done “in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor 14:40).¹¹⁴²

Indeed, the traditional style of worship requires rethinking with regard to adolescents and young people.¹¹⁴³ Outward expression of faith should be related to modern life and “expressed anew with every generation.”¹¹⁴⁴ This statement is especially relevant in relation to the rapid changes in popular culture due to the widespread use of IT.

But church does not only straddle a generation gap. It also crosses the boundaries of the subculture, making the gospel comprehensible for unbelievers, since they also constitute part of worship in a certain sense.¹¹⁴⁵ The Apostle Paul speaks of the presence of others at services and

consumed but never consummated.” (Peck, *Living Worship*, p. 21.)

¹¹³⁸ Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life*, p. 407.

¹¹³⁹ Charles Davis, “Ghetto or Desert: Liturgy in a cultural dilemma,” in *Worship and Secularization*, ed. Wiebe Vos (Bussum, Holland: Paul Brand, 1970): 19-23.

¹¹⁴⁰ As noted by James McClendon, “over long periods of time Christian worship missed its mark by seeking a nostalgic return to real or mythical past time.” He continues with the statement: “But true biblical worship is never nostalgic and never mythical; its feet are firmly planted in the here and now of today, and its movement is forward, on to the beckoning end.” (McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 408.)

¹¹⁴¹ Personal notes, p. 80b.

¹¹⁴² “O kharizmatii” [On Charismatics]. Open letter of the Union Council of Baptist Churches in Russia to Baptist Churches, <http://ehbtambov.ru/archives/2142>, last accessed 16 May 2019.

¹¹⁴³ Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, p. 21.

¹¹⁴⁴ Joseph Blosser, “Ritual Revival for Playful Protestant Preaching,” *Encounter*, vol. 67, Iss. 3 (Summer, 2006): 252.

¹¹⁴⁵ See in this regard the definition by Keith Jones: “Rather than such concepts as ‘Public worship’ where the doors are open wide (it can almost be a civic requirement), everyone comes in, believer and unbeliever...”, and “Private worship, where all but the elect. . . are locked out at the door” Jones prefers “‘Porous worship,’ where a

the positive effect they should gain from the service.¹¹⁴⁶ Such a result is achieved by adaptation of the language to the level of understanding of the visitors and omitting secret coded rituals, in favor of self-explanatory steps.¹¹⁴⁷

Thus, if for certain groups of people and in certain communities, especially village churches, the issue of inculturation requires the preservation of the *status quo*, in the broad context, changes in the language and culture make this issue a crucial one both in terms of mission (relevance to outsiders, who come to public worship) and of edification (relevance to insiders, living in the world). The necessity to bridge worship and ethics (daily living) also promotes modification in worship, which does not come down to primitive copying and uncritical borrowing, but is the result of a meaningful and reasonable strategy, appropriate in this context. In its turn New Testament examples of culture transformation and overcoming national barriers¹¹⁴⁸ bring this demand beyond the limits of tastes and preferences and build a healthy biblical foundation for the need in inculturation.

8.3.2. Inculturation: a theological model for traditional Baptist worship

Inculturation is not a simple process. Here one takes into account the gospel itself, tradition, culture, and social changes.¹¹⁴⁹ “A way needs to be found to avoid either a slavish copying of the past or an inappropriate submission to the spirit of the present age.”¹¹⁵⁰ This call

core of covenanted believers engage together in worship, which is a meal, a narrative and a prayer. Yet others are welcome to ‘taste and see’ for ‘even the dogs under the table get the crumbs’ (Mark 7:27-28) as the Syro-Phoenician woman declares.” (“On Abandoning Public Worship,” p. 20.) See also Keith G. Jones, “Towards a Model of Mission for Gathering, Intentional, Convictional Koinonia,” *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (January 2004): 5-13. For an evaluation of Jones’ concept of “Porous worship”, see Parush R. Parushev, “Gathered, Gathering, Porous: Reflections on the nature of baptistic community,” *Baptistic Theologies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 35-52. Patrick Keifert considers the possible presence of non-believers important on the basis of the Old Testament concept that “The temple was the Lord’s house, and Israel, like the foreigner, was dependent upon the Lord’s hospitality. Thus, Israel’s worship was to be hospitable to the stranger because God commanded it.” (See 1 Kings 8:41-43). “The temple is the Lord’s house, not Solomon’s. The place of the stranger is thereby guaranteed by the Lord’s hospitality.” For both citations, see Patrick Keifert, “Guess Who’s Coming to Worship? Worship and Evangelism,” *Word&World*, IX, no. 1 (Winter, 1989): 49.

¹¹⁴⁶ 1 Cor. 14:23-25.

¹¹⁴⁷ Keith Pecklers states, that “The simple presence of four gospels rather than one already suggests something of the need to contextualize the message” (Pecklers F. Keith, *Worship* [London: Continuum, 2003], p. 127.)

¹¹⁴⁸ Acts 10; 15:1-32.

¹¹⁴⁹ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknol: Orbis, 1992), p. 1, cited in Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, p. 109.

¹¹⁵⁰ Ellis, *Gathering*, p. 16. Likewise, James Cox calls the church neither to be enticed away by the charm of the past nor by the novelty of the present (James W. Cox, *Preaching* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985], pp. 49-50). Raymond Bailey puts it, “Let us not be hypnotized by the old nor fascinated by the new” (“The Changing Face of Baptist Worship,” *Review and Expositors*, vol. 95, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 57). Robb Redman even goes further explaining that the key to “the worship awakening is not the opposition of new and old, but rather the fusion of ancient and contemporary forms, as well high and low technology” (Robb Redman, “Worship Wars or Worship Awakening?” *Liturgy*, vol. 19, iss. 4 [2004]: 39-40.)

As these writers call for a balance between past and present, Slavic Baptist author Mikhail Cherenkov in his turn is looking for balance between religious and secular culture, introducing the notion of inseparability-unmergedness. “If we make use of the language of the Orthodox culture and church tradition, then inseparability-unmergedness seems to be the principle that we were looking for regarding identity of protestant evangelical church

for balance, prudence, evaluation of the cultural context and thorough theological analysis is very relevant in Belarusian churches in order to avoid the extremes of inertness, reproduction of the usual order or hasty and uncritical adaptation.

In light of the above, I next propose a pattern of inculturation which largely follows John Witvliet's work. With reference to some of the recent work in liturgical inculturation and with regard to the models outlined by Niebuhr and Bevans,¹¹⁵¹ Witvliet offers a number of theses which can serve as a manual for the practical inculturation of worship. I list them below and provide comment in regard to their application in the traditional Baptist worship context.

Thesis 1: All liturgical action is culturally conditioned. No circumspect attempt at liturgical reform, liturgical inculturation, or cultural critique can glibly assume that liturgy is not shaped by its cultural environment.

Thesis 2: The relationship between liturgy and culture is theologically framed by the biblical-theological categories of creation and incarnation. Inculturation is both possible and necessary because of the twin claims that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" and that "the Word became flesh and lived among us."¹¹⁵²

Thesis 3: Liturgical inculturation requires theologically informed cultural criticism of one's own cultural context.

Thesis 4: The extremes of either complete identification with or rejection of a given culture are to be avoided at all costs.

Thesis 5: Liturgical action must reflect common elements in the Christian tradition through the unique expressions of a particular cultural context. There must be a judicious balance of particularization and universality.

Thesis 6: This balance of particularization and universality requires "a mediating strategy" for liturgical inculturation. Often such strategies are summarized in a single phrase: "transforming culture," "dynamic equivalence," "creative assimilation."

*Thesis 7: The constituent liturgical actions of the Christian church – including proclamation of the Word, common prayer, baptism, and Eucharist – are among the "universal" or common factors in the Christian tradition.*¹¹⁵³

1. "*All liturgical action is culturally conditioned.* No circumspect attempt at liturgical reform, liturgical inculturation, or cultural critique can glibly assume that liturgy is not shaped by its cultural environment."

Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener would support this idea, noting that "culture forms the bed in which the streams of religion and faith flow."¹¹⁵⁴ Participants "are inculturated human beings whose lives are irrevocably shaped by the culture in which they live."¹¹⁵⁵ Their actions reflect

in Orthodox historical and cultural context. Inseparability-unmergedness means immersion into the local social cultural context and a certain freedom from the context at the same time, as well as detachment and submission to the higher authority of universal evangelical principals and values." (*Litsom k litsu*, p. 66.)

¹¹⁵¹ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*; Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*.

¹¹⁵² "Contemporary scholars tend to speak of a four-fold theological foundation for inculturation: creation, incarnation, redemption through the paschal mystery and Pentecost" (Pecklers and Keith, *Worship*, p. 120).

¹¹⁵³ Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, pp. 109-123.

¹¹⁵⁴ Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, p. 44.

¹¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

political and religious context, and local culture.¹¹⁵⁶ The diversity of cultures provides “diversity in the Body of Christ, including diversity in forms of Christian worship.”¹¹⁵⁷ The matter is only in how it influences and to what degree the various components of worship have experienced the influence of the local or foreign culture.

As studies in worship formation and its contexts prove, the influence is revealed in patterns of communication,¹¹⁵⁸ or music, festivals, language, architecture. This brings to mind once more the impact of the Orthodox environment and the context of persecution on these elements of Baptist worship in Belarus (see sections 4.2 and 4.3; and regarding architecture, section 5.4.1). A study of Baptist worship practice in different parts of Belarus (e.g. in the churches of south-west and north of Belarus) might reveal additional elements of local culture, which have contributed to the formation of the given form of services.¹¹⁵⁹ A comparative analysis of different evangelical subcultures (Charismatic, Pentecostal, and Baptist) is of special interest. It shows how local and western influences manifest themselves in different communities (compare, for example, the “restrained” attitude to prayer among the Baptists and the loud praise of Pentecostal prayer, often shifting to shouting). Understanding the cultural conditioning of worship allows one to start a dialogue between worship and culture, which might turn out to be very productive.

2. *“The relationship between liturgy and culture is theologically framed by the biblical-theological categories of creation and incarnation.* Inculturation is both possible and necessary because of the twin claims that ‘in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’ and that ‘the Word became flesh and lived among us.’”

The second thesis, which directs attention to the theology of creation and incarnation, is of special significance in the context of the Russian-speaking Baptist movement, which was shaped under persecution from the state. The total control of the communist regime over literature, theater, cinema, visual art and other kinds of arts, as well as the antireligious orientation of art contributed to the negative attitude among Baptists to mass culture in general (even though classical works of writers, artists and composers of pre-revolution period enjoyed acceptance among believers). The main texts defining this attitude were “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” and “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”¹¹⁶⁰ Little attention even now is paid to the

¹¹⁵⁶ “There are no aspects of Christian liturgy that are not derived from the various cultures through which it has passed in its historical evolution (e.g., Jewish meals, Greek rhetoric, Roman models of leadership, Byzantine court ceremonial, Mediterranean solstice festivals, etc.)” (Senn, *Christian Liturgy Catholic and Evangelical*, p. 676.)

¹¹⁵⁷ White, *Groundwork of Christian Worship*, p. 186.

¹¹⁵⁸ Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, p. 114.

¹¹⁵⁹ See footnotes 384 and 386 – about the influence of the Orthodox or Catholic context on Easter celebrations in churches in different regions of Belarus.

¹¹⁶⁰ 1 John 5:19; 2:15.

continuous action of common grace and the providential work of God in the world, which is expressed in the first chapters of Genesis or Psalms,¹¹⁶¹ including people being created in His likeness and image who are able to create.

If we see culture only as an enemy, then it would be impossible either to influence it, or adapt and change it to some new forms on the basis of “*the biblical-theological categories of creation and incarnation*.”¹¹⁶² But the development of the idea of creation opens doors to “full participation in and critique of culture,”¹¹⁶³ and wise stewardship of God’s gifts that we receive through nature and the abilities of people. One could take “Jubal’s music”¹¹⁶⁴ and use it in worship (Jubal and Tubal-cain, the descendants of Cain, can be considered as representatives of secular society). “Hiram from Tyre” could build and decorate houses of prayer by using “Tubal-cain’s hammer.”¹¹⁶⁵ It is possible that electronic musical instruments, popular musical styles as well as Belarusian folk instruments, like the duda, zhaleyka, and dulcimer, drama,¹¹⁶⁶ and fine art will find their place in worship and in such manner the church would “return” what belongs to Him.¹¹⁶⁷ A secular culture would be redeemed, and that is a pressing task.¹¹⁶⁸

Doctrines of creation and incarnation provide the basis for using anything that has been created, or the sanctification of any earthly vessel (including cultural life) that has been created by the Creator or by people created in His image and likeness. Attention to incarnation in its turn contributes to the idea of the entrance of God into the everyday life of the world and His involvement in the activities of the world. Even our mundane daily routine could be transformed and offered to God. Grasping incarnation in relation to worship allows crossing the boundaries between sacred and secular, filling the forms that are used in this world, whether those are verbal, musical, or other, giving them a new meaning and using them in the life of church.

3. “*Liturgical inculturation requires theologically informed cultural criticism of one’s own cultural context.*”

¹¹⁶¹ Schmemmann discusses sacramental nature of the world, understanding it as “an epiphany of God, a means of His revelation, presence, and power” (Schmemmann, “Worship in a Secular Age,” p. 120). Unfortunately, he does not spend much time in supporting and clarifying his point.

¹¹⁶² Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, p. 115.

¹¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 116.

¹¹⁶⁴ Gen. 4:21.

¹¹⁶⁵ 1 Kings 7:13; Gen. 4:22.

¹¹⁶⁶ In 2013-2017 a group of enthusiasts, consisting of the members of evangelical churches, prepared some theater plays related to the history of Christianity in Belarus: 600th anniversary of the preaching of Jerome of Prague, a Czech reformer, in the Great Duchy of Lithuania (in Vil’no, Vitebsk and Polotsk) in 2013; 500th anniversary of a prominent figure of Belarusian and western European Reformation Nikolai Radzivill Cherny in 2015; 500th anniversary of the publication of a Belarusian Bible by Francis Scorina in 2017. The plays took place in a number of theaters in Belarus and they or their parts were performed at various celebrations and church worship times. The audience appreciated/valued them as a mighty tool of Gospel presentation, which was suitable even inside the house of prayer.

¹¹⁶⁷ Matt. 22:21. “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”

¹¹⁶⁸ Davis, “Ghetto or Desert,” p. 21.

People ought to study not only history and worship but the basic moments of cultural context,¹¹⁶⁹ cultures of conduct, and characteristic traits of people. Those who wish to reform worship need to consider the conservatism and traditionalism of Belarusians, their tendency to preserve their traditions and existing order of things (which is reflected in their attitude to politics), and patience and submissiveness to their fate, which is clearly revealed in poems, especially such significant ones as “Ya muzhyk-belarus...” (“I am a muzhik-Belarusian”) and “Nash rodny kray” (“Our native land”) by famous Belarusian poets of the past Yanka Kupala (1882-1942)¹¹⁷⁰ and Yakub Kolas (1882-1956).¹¹⁷¹ Nevertheless, the desire to preserve the *status quo* and avoid changes could equally be a manifestation of the unhelpful qualities of laziness, cowardice, passiveness, and insecurity, which ought to be overcome.

In relation to Belarusian national culture elements of folklore, or rituals and rites related to agriculture are often mentioned in society. However, such concepts do not play significant role in the life of people today due to prevalence of the Russian language, urbanization and the “Americanization” of culture. The young generation is strongly influenced by IT, western music and the television industry. Culture is pluralistic though, and in considering it, attention needs to be paid to the various groups of people to which the church is oriented as well as the region it is in. For example, the Transfiguration feast (19th of August) could find a broad response among villagers, since the feast is related to harvest, planting and the dedication of fruit in an agricultural society. In such instances it is important not only to engage people in worship or refer to local culture, “but rather to discern how particular cultural traits both enhance and obscure the nature and purpose of liturgy.”¹¹⁷² If certain cultural elements and traditions are able to make the Gospel clearer, then their inclusion in worship is going to contribute to a more profound worship in the local culture.¹¹⁷³ In fact, Baptists in Belarus generally see their goal as planting new churches and their focus as the spiritual maturity of Christians and not in terms of having resources or being in a position to influence mass culture.¹¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, transformation could at least occur in the life of Christians and their relatives when worship is engaged in everyday life, when it goes beyond the limits of a house of prayer, when a family practices Bible reading and singing, and when shared dinner turns into a small piece of worship. This allows making the ties between worship and life stronger.

¹¹⁶⁹ Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, pp. 116-117.

¹¹⁷⁰ True name is Ivan Dominikovich Lutsevich.

¹¹⁷¹ True name is Konstantin Mikhailovich Mitskevich.

¹¹⁷² Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, p. 118.

¹¹⁷³ “Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture,” 3.1, in, ed., *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices*, ed. Charles E. Farhadian (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 285-290.

¹¹⁷⁴ The exception is the music concert put on by “City of Light” in Brest, attracting thousands of young people. It has been running for several years in the summer on City Day in the main city square or sports grounds ECB church “Salvation” is the organizer of the event, and in this way the church tries to shed the light of love and kindness onto youth culture.

Basically, the relationship of worship and life is a two-way road. Way of life transforms worship and worship forms actions, traditions, lifestyle and most certainly spiritual practices that extend beyond worship. Worship in the house of prayer is reflected in prayers in the home of a Christian when they incorporate church requests into the prayer, prays for ministers, brothers and sisters in Christ and other churches. The Sunday sermon encourages people during their devotions at home to read and meditate over the Bible texts that have been read in worship. The praxis of fasting is determined by church life and the needs of the community. In this way worship considerably defines the spiritual discipline of worship participants).

4. *“The extremes of either complete identification with or rejection of a given culture are to be avoided at all costs.”*

In inculturation one should avoid thoughtless imitation, or “cultural capitulation,” on the one hand, and escapism and “cultural irrelevance” on the other.¹¹⁷⁵ The second extreme is more typical for traditional worship. In essence, worship as well as education, business and politics does not appear to be a sphere of cultural engagement.¹¹⁷⁶ If politics is regarded as a secular business, unacceptable for a Christian (and that is why dialogue is impossible), then worship is too sacred to introduce the “world” into it. One musician and choir conductor in Minsk, representing traditional worship, explained, “I can listen to secular music at home but worldly music styles are unacceptable in church and only church music should be used. ‘House clothes’ are not suitable for coming to church.” Splitting a Christian’s life into their life in the house of prayer and life beyond it leads to profanation of life and the extreme sacralization of worship, which is not helpful in terms of their dialogue. This type of approach needs to be corrected. In the evangelical context people should be reminded that Christianity is primarily a lifestyle and not a worship style, and in this manner the boundary between ethics and worship should be removed.¹¹⁷⁷

Wise is the church that seeks to be “in” but not “of” the world, (John 15:19) resisting aspects of the culture that compromise the integrity of the gospel, and eagerly engaging its culture with the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ who comes to each culture, but is not bound by any culture.¹¹⁷⁸

¹¹⁷⁵ Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, p. 119.

¹¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 107.

¹¹⁷⁷ Alexander Schmemmann calls for the “reconciliation’ and mutual reintegration of liturgy, theology and piety.” See Fisch, ed., *Liturgy and Tradition*, p. 42. However, in Schmemmann’s understanding this reconciliation is important not for changing worship but for the intensification of the influence of liturgy on life and theology.

¹¹⁷⁸ World Communion of Reformed Churches, “Worshiping the Triune God: Receiving and Sharing Christian Wisdom Across Continents and Centuries,” 1.4. This statement was adopted by the newly formed World Communion of Reformed Churches in 2010 (<http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/worshiping-the-triune-god-receiving-and-sharing-christian-wisdom-across-continents-and-centuries>, last accessed 16 May 2019).

5. “*Liturgical action must reflect common elements in the Christian tradition through the unique expressions of a particular cultural context. There must be a judicious balance of particularization and universality.*”

Witvliet’s model calls for a “*balance of particularization and universality.*”¹¹⁷⁹ Worship crosses over the boundaries of primitive repetition and the blind, mechanical transfer of customs and forms.¹¹⁸⁰ It reflects elements of local culture and at the same time, it does not exclude the opportunity of full participation of a representative of another culture and even reinforces the Gospel through the given characteristics of the given culture. In traditional worship such balance is revealed by using the same basic elements—sermons, songs, prayers—in different forms, that may appear especially different if compared to Baptist churches in the West. For example, Baptists kneeling down for prayer and saying extempore prayers from each one’s place, which reflects their understanding of being in awe of God and freedom in Spirit. It is interesting that Belarusian contemporary worship shows very little signs of particularity in this way. There is little difference from similar forms in the United Kingdom or the United States apart from the language. Contemporary worship is drawn more towards unification rather than uniqueness but John Witvliet believes that “the universal is expressed most clearly through the particular.”¹¹⁸¹ In regard to music, for example, wind instruments or folk instrument orchestras could provide an opportunity for the inculturation of worship in the local context. On the other hand, the traditional approach does not pay enough attention to the globalization of culture, insisting on last-century tradition, and the practice of modern worship could be analyzed as an illustration of an alternative attempt to balance *particularization and universality* in modern reality.¹¹⁸²

6. “*This balance of particularization and universality requires ‘a mediating strategy’ for liturgical inculturation.* Often such strategies are summarized in a single phrase: ‘transforming culture,’ ‘dynamic equivalence,’ ‘creative assimilation.’

The sixth thesis offers “*a mediating strategy*” for inculturation. Referring to Roman Catholic Anscar Chupungco, John Witvliet offers such methods as “dynamic equivalence,”

¹¹⁷⁹ Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, p. 119.

¹¹⁸⁰ “Four basic dualities that define judicious liturgical inculturation” by Anita Stauffer might be a good tool for successful inculturation. In her opinion liturgy should be “authentic and relevant,” “Lutheran [that is, oriented to a particular tradition] and catholic,” “local and global,” “Christocentric and anthropocentric.” (S. Anita Stauffer, “Christian Worship: Towards Localization and Globalization,” in *Worship and Culture in Dialogue*, ed. S. Anita Stauffer [Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1994], pp. 9-10.) These opposites help to evaluate components of the worship, and bring to light local extremes and the mechanical transfer from other traditions.

¹¹⁸¹ Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, p. 120.

¹¹⁸² D.H. Hislop writes concerning three laws of liturgical development. “The first may be called the principle of survival....” “The second principle appears the antithesis of the first. It is the law whereby the living faith is ever freeing itself from dead tradition and conventional expression. The wine of the Spirit is ever bursting the skins of tradition....” “The third principle harmonizes the two former. We might call it the law of expansion. In its operation it preserves the old rite but attaches a new meaning to it. The Faith, ever seeking new forms of expression, adopts ceremonies, symbols, and rites which have sprung from alien sources.” (D.H. Hislop, *Our Heritage in Public Worship* [Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1936], pp. 6-7.)

“creative assimilation,” and “organic progression,”¹¹⁸³ which suggest the corresponding replacement of a ritual by its local equivalent, or the assimilation of certain forms of culture or development of new forms in dialogue with the local culture. Implementation of these methods asks for a creative approach and out-of-the-box-solutions, in the same way as the church has actually done from the very beginning by transforming Jewish or Pagan forms, filling them with new content and often shape the form of the element. “Proselyte baptism is transformed into Christian baptism, and pagan myths are transformed into Christian parables.”¹¹⁸⁴ The Easter meal became the Lord’s Supper, the Day of the Invincible Sun turned into Christmas. Rhetoric found its expression in sermon. In the years of persecution the conditions forced Christians look for dynamic equivalents: Christians in prisons and camps narrated that in order to do Communion without any wine or grape juice they used beet juice. Similar examples might become models for finding equivalents or ways of assimilation and introducing local traditions (if they are not associated with superstitions) into worship. Folk tunes or secular celebrations like Victory’s Day (May 9), Independence Day (July 3), may be appropriate places to start. (For other contemporary examples see section 8.3.3.)

7. *“The constituent liturgical actions of the Christian church – including proclamation of the Word, common prayer, baptism, and Eucharist – are among the ‘universal’ or common factors in the Christian tradition...”*

Referring to other authors, Witvliet suggests a kind of canon for worship—a set of nonnegotiable common aspects, which include proclamation of the Word, common prayer, baptism, and Eucharist.¹¹⁸⁵ Belarusian Baptists would indeed accept this “canon,” overlaying it with singing. Sermons, prayer and singing are presented in various proportions in worship but even with all the controversy about the number and length of sermons, forms of prayer and music styles their existence as core elements has been never argued in regular worship, whereas baptism is regarded as a separate event, not as a part of regular worship, and in most churches it is practiced once a year¹¹⁸⁶ while the Lord’s Supper is practiced once a month. Yet any restriction in the frequency of celebration is compensated by special attention to these elements

¹¹⁸³ Anscar Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 37, cited in Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), pp. 120-121.

¹¹⁸⁴ Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, p. 121.

¹¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

Gordon Lathrop, in his book *Holy Things* and again in his *Holy People*, has developed a shorthand way of describing this deep tradition of worship. He speaks of Book, Bath, and Meal. Book, of course, refers to the reading of Scripture, and not only its reading but its interpretation, and some kind of proclamation. Bath refers to baptism, whether preceded by teaching or followed by teaching. And Meal refers to the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist or Holy Communion. Lathrop would identify Book, Bath, and Meal as the essentials of Christian worship or what he prefers to describe as the “central things.” See Ronald P. Byars, *The Future of Protestant Worship: Beyond the Worship Wars* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 40.

¹¹⁸⁶ See discussion about baptisteries in this thesis, section 5.4.2.2. Interior spaces.

and the solemnity of the occasions of baptism and the Lord's Supper. In any case, focus on key elements helps to preserve the crux of the service and worship does not lose its identity while it may transform in terms of culture.

In this way, conscious efforts in inculturation, as made clear in the theological model suggested by John Witvliet, require thorough study and analysis of theology of worship, context of formation, worship in church history, and in other traditions and contexts, local traditions and culture. Taking into consideration the respect for the traditions of middle-aged and older Belarusians, especially religious ones, we understand that the changes cannot be undertaken without pastoral sensitivity, patience, and love. The pastor's credibility, good relationships and patience become key factors in inculturation, as well as persistence and consistency in decisions. The call to evangelism and teaching the truths of faith do not leave the church any choice other than ongoing renewal of worship in dialogue with culture.

8.3.3. Inculturation: Building a bridge in the practice of traditional Baptist worship

For Belarusian Baptists, with their emphasis on the centrality of the Bible, inculturation may well begin with the Bible. Using the *koine*, the common language of the Greek-speaking empire, the New Testament provides a serious theological and historical argument for the use of modern translations in the common language of the people. Their use in worship (perhaps to start with as a separate piece of reading) would gradually change the language of sermons, prayers, and singing, serving to demystify worship and bringing worship language closer to everyday usage.¹¹⁸⁷

Traditionalists argue that there is no need to abandon the “inspired and infallible” Synodal translation, all the more so in that it has proved to be effective, having transformed their lives and continues to transform people. They would say that it is not difficult to learn and remember several hundreds of Slavonic terms. In fact, zealous Orthodox Christians in Belarus say similar things about the Church Slavonic translation, but in practice this good aspiration does not work, especially as this involves not only separate words but the style too.¹¹⁸⁸

“Theologically informed cultural criticism” (see Witvliet's Thesis 3) requires avoiding extremes (Thesis 4), and considering church composition, various age groups and attitudes

¹¹⁸⁷ New translations are already widely used in personal worship by many believers and Bible study groups. In September 2012, when the Minsk Theological Seminary received nine full-time students for a one-year program, the theology teacher immediately faced a new problem because all these students were using a new translation by the Russian Bible Society, published in 2011, whereas the theology course was based on the Synodal translation. Five of the students were originally from churches practicing contemporary worship styles, but it is possible to speak about this tendency in many places.

¹¹⁸⁸ In my Homiletics class when teaching Russian-speaking groups in Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Estonia, and Moldova, I ask about old words from the Synodal version, and even preachers cannot explain the meaning of some Slavonicisms without a dictionary.

towards religion in society. Martie McMane's caution should be taken seriously, that "Language that is too formal or stilted does not invite people in. Language that is too colloquial or folksy may not convey enough *importance or reverence*."¹¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, some steps in this direction could be taken. One of the options is publishing a revised Synodal version, where outdated words and phrases or the ones which have acquired new meaning could be replaced.¹¹⁹⁰

The issue of translation and interpretation of the Bible is directly related to the practice of preaching. One of the maladies of traditional preaching is homiletic heresy, which Clyde Fant calls "the leaven of the Pharisees."¹¹⁹¹ The heresy finds its expression in homiletic Docetism—that is, in avoiding the human side of the sermon, so emphasis is put on the original meaning of the text, its historical and cultural analysis and the exposition is done in church language and an inflated style.¹¹⁹² In regards to preaching in the churches in Belarus one could hardly complain about the passion for exegesis. Nevertheless, the terms and topics reflect the world of the Bible. Bridging the gap means building a bridge to the modern world, to the world of the audience, which is application, addressing urgent topics, responding to the needs of people, using real-life illustrations, secular literature and arts and comprehensive language. At the same time, Fant argues, the actualization should not lead into another extreme, "the heresy of Sadducees, ignoring the authority and power of the Bible and exaggerated attention to [the] human factor."¹¹⁹³

An interesting attempt to make the sermon relevant was described in a report by the Commissioner for Religious Affairs in Belarus of 11 May 1986. While describing Easter worship in Baptist churches, he notes that even though "most of the sermons were traditional and repetitive, the same accounts of Christian doctrine were revealed over and over again."¹¹⁹⁴ The report continues, "The sermons, especially in Fortechynaya str. in Brest and other communities, were abounding in illustrations of so-called secular character: the poems by E. Eutushenko were quoted, as well as records by Mamin-Sibiriak and local poetry."¹¹⁹⁵ The Baptists turned to the authoritative sources under the pressure of an atheist regime in order to prove that their faith was legitimate. In the twenty-first century the conflict between atheism and faith lost its urgency and

¹¹⁸⁹ Martie Source McMane, "That They May Have Life," *Liturgy*, vol. 20, iss. 2. (2005): 42. (Emphasis in original).

¹¹⁹⁰ The publishers of a Russian-language version of *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Slavic Gospel Association) took this approach by substituting some of the borrowings from other languages and archaic words and expressions with their equivalents, which are clear to a modern reader. However, this publication is appreciated more as a commentary and it is primarily used for sermon preparation and Bible study.

¹¹⁹¹ Clyde E. Fant, *Preaching for Today* (New York: Harper&Row, Publishers, 1975), pp. 30-41.

¹¹⁹² Ibid.

¹¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁹⁴ Probably this is the evaluation of "the ministry of the word" by a stranger when he has the opportunity to listen to 3 or 4 sermons on the same topic of resurrection of Jesus Christ.

¹¹⁹⁵ NARB, Stock 136, File 1, Case 88, p. 155.

Eugeny Eutushenko (born in 1932) is a Russian Soviet poet, writer, director, scriptwriter, and publicist. Dmitry Mamin-Sibiriak (1852—1912) was a Russian novelist and playwright.

the apologetic element became less relevant. But quoting great scholars such as Newton, Pascal or writers and poets like Dostoevsky and Lermontov, or Belarusian writer Vasil' Bykau and Nobel Prize winner in Literature (2015) Svetlana Alexievich could contribute to relevant, yet indigenous sermons.

Another element to consider is singing. Its relation in maintaining traditional attitudes toward change is not fundamentally different from the question of using Bible translations. Of course, there is more flexibility with respect to this element, especially in terms of individual and group singing, which allows a lot of room for creativity, but communal singing is not subject to any major changes, having *Song of Revival* as its main (and mostly only) source. Old popular songs offer important emotional and spiritual ties with the Christians of other generations and traditions. They should not be excluded from worship and moreover, we should go further back than the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to include hymns of the Reformation and other periods. However, borrowings and new indigenous hymns will enrich worship and build better relationships with the present. In this area Prokhanov's example¹¹⁹⁶ can serve as a good precedent for the translation and writing of new songs that reflect the spiritual experiences of believers in the twenty-first century. We could connect this back to Witvliet's Thesis 2, affirming the constructive role of creativity in Christian calling and practice.

Historical studies provide some curious local examples of adaptation to the local culture and customs in the search for new effective methods. Several cases show how familiar forms, filled with a new content, were used in evangelism during the first third of the twentieth century. In regard to worship, evangelicals, for instance, were accused of using the words of well-known songs to promote their ideas. The following example is a famous song in the Soviet Union called "Suliko," composed by Varinka Tseretely to words from Akaky Tseretely in 1895. The first lines in translation from the Russian by Rachel Torpusman are as follows:

I was looking for the grave of my beloved –
And could find it nowhere!
I was weeping bitterly and saying all the time:
"My darling, where are you?"

Its edited "Christianized" version is:

I was looking for peace to my soul,
But it was hard to find.
I prayed for a long time and suffered.
I went a long way looking for it.¹¹⁹⁷

¹¹⁹⁶ See section 3.2.1.

¹¹⁹⁷ Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost'*, p. 450.

Second example – is actually a re-working of the lyrics to the music of the National Anthem of the Soviet Union (1944-1991).¹¹⁹⁸

United Forever in Friendship and Labour,
Our mighty Republics will ever endure.
The Great Soviet Union will Live through the Ages.
The Dream of a People their fortress secure.
Through Days dark and stormy where Great Lenin Lead us
Our Eyes saw the Bright Sun of Freedom above
and Stalin our Leader with Faith in the People,
Inspired us to Build up the Land that we Love.¹¹⁹⁹

Baptists put it this way:

An unbreakable union of great freedom,
The great love joined together forever to stand.
We are faithful to our One Lord,
And we have been washed in His blood.
Through tempests and storms of the sea of life
We'll go forward fearless of our mighty foes.
Christ will help us, because we are strong in Him,
And He is the Firstborn, He has paved the way!¹²⁰⁰

Even though they are creative, these examples do not sit comfortably in worship, especially the Anthem. It was often performed many times just as music without lyrics, and the tune brought to mind the original meaning, associated with socialism, the Communist Party and the names of Lenin and Stalin (in the first version of the Anthem). Even new words could not completely remove the associations. The same is partly true for another interesting case, the rearrangement of “Hallelujah,” the song of Canadian poet and singer Leonard Cohen.¹²⁰¹ It became popular in Belarus because of the animated film *Shrek*.¹²⁰² Considering that many older listeners are not necessarily familiar with *Shrek*, its performance does not awake so many associations with the characters and situation of the film. Below is the first stanza of the song as performed by a music group in “Bethlehem” church:

I love You with all my soul.
You have chosen me from the eternity.
And now, my God, I sing praise to you
You gave me grace from heaven.
I would like to tell everybody about it.
I sing Hallelujah from all my heart.¹²⁰³

¹¹⁹⁸ A.M. Prokhorov, chief ed., *Sovetskiy entsiklopedicheskiy slovar'*, izd. 4 [The Soviet Encyclopedic Dictionary, ed. 4] (Moskva: “Sovetskaya entsiklopediya,” 1987), p. 305.

¹¹⁹⁹ Sergei Mikhalkov, *Anthem of the Soviet Union* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzykal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1944), the first and second stanzas. English version by Paul Robeson.

¹²⁰⁰ Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriya i sovremennost'*, p. 451. Text put in poetry in English by Oksana Ostapovich.

¹²⁰¹ Leonard Cohen, “Hallelujah,” from *Various Positions* (Columbia Records, December 1984).

¹²⁰² Directed by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jensen (PDI/DreamWorks, 2001).

¹²⁰³ Text in Russian is written by Sergei Luk'yanov, Minsk Theological Seminary's dean and pastor (since

A better example of modern adaptation, considering its existing biblical connotations, might be the song of the choir of Jewish slaves “You Are Beautiful, oh, Our Motherland” from Giuseppe Verdi's opera “Nebuchadnezzar”¹²⁰⁴ rearranged in 2001 by the Music Department of Minsk Theological Seminary. The first stanza of the hymn is:

Eternal God, You are the source of the creation,
Your expanses are immense.
Ears of grain in the field sing a praise hymn,
And the fields are covered with flowers.
The mighty rivers are full of water,
They are clothed in luxurious green, the forests rustle;
The song for You will never cease
On earth, on water and in heaven.¹²⁰⁵

When talking about inculturation of music component of public worship, the notion of “translatibility” can be of good service.¹²⁰⁶ It is “more than just translation of words,” “more than just translation.”¹²⁰⁷ Marcel Barnard and other authors, using case studies from Malawi and Zimbabwe as illustrations, oppose “the uncritical transportation (transfer) of melodies from one culture to the other” as well as “the creation of hymns that pursue and express certain forms of culture uncritically.”¹²⁰⁸ They call for a development of a hymnology that “meets the sounds of a particular culture,” and the same time “reaches out to find those sounds of life across all cultures that resonate with the gospel of Life.”¹²⁰⁹ This kind of work demands knowing languages as well as having a deep understanding of culture and the Gospel.

Opportunities for changing/adapting public worship do not end with using new Bible translations and learning new songs while maintaining the existing heritage. Testimonies about God's providence in life, experience of living with the Lord, and also healings, revealing that the Lord is at work in the life of a Christian, may also connect worship with life. They can serve as a powerful tool to speak directly into lives through the experience of others and break through the wall between worship and life. In this way the link between public worship and the daily life of the Christians gets stronger, and “daily living, family, society and workplace are seen as the

2016) of “New Covenant” Baptist Church in Minsk.

¹²⁰⁴ Giuseppe Verdi, “Nebuchadnezzar,” 1841.

¹²⁰⁵ D.Y. Patsuk, ed., *Poyte Gospodu, svyatyte Yego... Khorovoy sbornik dlya smeshannogo khora s soprovozhdeniyem*, tom 2 [Sing to the Lord, His Saints... Choral Compilation for a Mixed Choir with Accompaniment, vol. 2] (Minsk: Muzykal'nyy otdel Minskoy bogoslovskoy seminarii Soyuz YEKHB v Belarusi, 2004-2006), pp. 20-24.

¹²⁰⁶ Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, pp. 200-206.

¹²⁰⁷ Ibid., 205.

¹²⁰⁸ Ibid., 206.

¹²⁰⁹ Ibid.

arenas of faithfulness, and worship is seen as the place where we rehearse this faithfulness.”¹²¹⁰ The same could be said about intercessory prayers. Lukas Vischer writes helpfully/insightfully about prayers for government, and victims of political or economic oppression,¹²¹¹ and the already mentioned book by Karl Barth could serve as a good example or pattern for these kinds of prayers.¹²¹²

Another area to be carefully considered is how some holidays and memorial days could be “baptized” and used in Christian worship. The dedication of some events to Yahweh in the Jewish tradition that are related to time spans (the new year and month, weeks, agricultural cycles),¹²¹³ and the transformation of Jewish and pagan feasts in church history is a good example. The short history of the evangelical movement in the Soviet Union displays some evidence of this idea, as seen in the accusations leveled against the Christians by atheists set out below:

The sectarians oppose their evangelical holidays to the revolutionary ones. They replace International Day of Working Women by a “Day of a Christian Woman.” As a rule during the day there are special meetings for women and generally women preach on that day. “A Week of Evangelism” is dedicated to Lenin’s Days and they also have some more “Weeks of Evangelism”. . . Instead of May 1 as a Holiday of International Solidarity of the Working Class, they celebrate “Day of Evangelical International.” In contrast to the Day of Harvest and Collectivization they have “Harvest Day” when they send groups of “teams” going around villages (3-5 people each).¹²¹⁴

Modern examples are attempts to Christianize Saint Valentine’s Day and International Women’s Day, although a fully-fledged integration of International Women’s Day is hampered by socialist (Soviet) connotations.¹²¹⁵ Nowadays Saint Valentine’s Day is celebrated on February 14 in some churches in Minsk, receiving more importance than the feast of the Meeting of the Lord on the following day, February 15. Some churches do not celebrate the latter and have some special activities for youth on the day before.¹²¹⁶ The celebration is used as a good pretext

¹²¹⁰ Ellis, “Gathering Struggles: Creative Tensions in Baptist Worship,” p. 18.

¹²¹¹ Lukas Vischer, “Worship as Christian Witness to Society,” in *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches: Past and Present*: 418.

¹²¹² Barth, *Moltva*.

¹²¹³ Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory. Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), p. 99.

¹²¹⁴ A. Yartsev, *Sekta evangel’skikh khristian* [The Sect of Evangelical Christians] (Moskva: “Bezbozhnik,” 1930), p. 18.

¹²¹⁵ Guiver offers the concept defumigation for integration in the service of some cultural elements. “Cultures often have to go through a period of ‘defumigation’ before the liturgy can take them on board. A country where tribal drum-music is associated with devil-worship means drums will be unusable until they have known some decline, which may require the wait of a generation. An example of a defumigation process getting stuck is the early banning of musical instruments from worship. . . The principle of defumigation applies even today: churches wanting to introduce modern music tend to opt for styles at least a generation out of date. Power of association brings problems for inculturation that can leave Christians preferring to dress their worship in weak examples of cultural tradition, rather than the most lively and vigorous.” (George Guiver, *Vision upon Vision. Processes of Change and Renewal in Christian Worship* [Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2009], p. 81.)

¹²¹⁶ “Bethlehem,” “New Earth,” Minsk. (Dmitriy Mamoiiko and Jacob Timofeev, Personal interview with

for discussion about relationships between boys and girls, and eventually about God's love. In addition, some churches, such as "Salvation" in Kolodishchi, Minsk region, use the secular celebration on March 8 for a day of thanksgiving and prayer for mothers and wives.¹²¹⁷ Yet there is no single approach to celebrations. Some churches try to transform celebrations by rejecting their primary meaning, and others add new meaning to the secular one.

Adhering to uniformity is perhaps not the key issue. As Kathleen Hughes suggests, there are various approaches to the adaptation of feasts: opposition, identification, purification [adding new meaning], paradox [using both primary and new meaning], and transformation [when celebration becomes a symbol of a deeper meaning].¹²¹⁸ Variety in methods could encourage creative assimilation¹²¹⁹ in celebrating Constitution Day (March 15), for example, when people might be reminded about their civil duties and pray about the country; Labor Day (May 1), when people could dedicate their labor to God and be encouraged to work diligently;¹²²⁰ Chernobyl Catastrophe Day (April 26), which could become the day of supplication for suffering people and collection of finances for mercy and charity activities and/or also an occasion to talk about the environment and our responsibility to care for the world God created in love.¹²²¹ Christian connotation and meaning can also be given to the increasingly popular Family Day (15 May) and Mother's Day (14 October), and attention devoted to young people on the last Sunday in June), to elderly people on 1 October, the Day of the Elderly), and to the disabled on 3 December.

Yet another matter to consider is the extent to which liturgical and secular calendars match the life routines of the majority of the people. Writing from an American perspective, Hughes points to the fact that for the majority of the population, a new life cycle starts with the beginning of a school year in September.¹²²² Since the academic year reflects the life of the society, "our cycle of feasts and seasons needs to acknowledge this rhythm and to accommodate this experience of time, of new beginnings, of completion and joyous endings, and of certain shadow experiences inherent in both."¹²²³ It is a fair observation that can be applied to the rhythm of life of Belarusians as well. In reality many churches do lift up their prayers in the beginning of September for children and students but this does not impact the direction of the whole process of worship and they become only one of its numerous components.

author, Minsk, 21 November 2014 and 15 October 2015 [Personal notes, p. 80b].)

¹²¹⁷ Nikolai Sinkovets, Personal interview with author, Minsk, 28 May 2013 (Personal notes, p. 80b).

International Women's Day is celebrated each year on 8 March in a number of countries as "Women's Day." Historically it started in the US as a day of solidarity of working women in the struggle for equal rights and emancipation.

¹²¹⁸ Kathleen Hughes, "Liturgical Year: Conflict and Challenge," in *The Church Gives Thanks and Remembers*, ed. by Lawrence J. Johnson (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1984), p. 71.

¹²¹⁹ "Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture," 3.4.

¹²²⁰ Hughes, "Liturgical Year: Conflict and Challenge," p. 73.

¹²²¹ Thanks to Lina Toth (Andronovienne) for reminding me about the environment.

¹²²² Ibid., p. 78.

¹²²³ Ibid., p. 82.

Secular culture challenges Christianity by strong promotion of secular inculturation. As a result, there is evisceration of the religious meaning of Christmas and Easter, even though their social status has been lifted up and they have been officially included into days of celebration. Christmas, both “Orthodox” (Eastern calendar) and “Catholic” (Western calendar) has been announced as a public holiday, in stark contrast to the Soviet era, when both Christmas and Easter time were enforced as working days. Evangelical churches strive to return the meaning of Christmas and Easter to the world by using this time for evangelistic events. Strong reiteration of their meaning is important, but the simultaneous activity of the intentional assimilation of some folk and state holidays into worship, could enrich worship as well as deepen the role of faith in the everyday life of Christians and their family and friends.

Various life events could be included in worship along with celebrations. The birth of a child, marriage, news about someone’s death are quite often a part of worship. The list could be completed by entrance to college or university, graduation, a new job, and significant milestones such as silver or golden wedding anniversaries. Current joys and sorrows of church members and visitors, depending on the size of the church, could be incorporated into an evening service or become an addition to the service and be celebrated during, for example, a shared tea-party.¹²²⁴ This would not be to detract from the central importance of worship staying Christocentric and focus on the saving acts of God in Christ.

Inculturation is not an easy task, and one should take into consideration biblical content, Baptist identity, historical heritage and appropriate forms for the given context and time. Charles Davis calls for prudence in such changes. Old forms “at least [have] an aura of venerable tradition,” and reforms do not always meet expectations.¹²²⁵ Passionate keepers of tradition have some reasons to be apprehensive about too rapid and drastic changes in public worship under new political circumstances. A Ukrainian Baptist minister, Volodimir Matviiv notes that for a long time Christians were limited by the four walls of the house of prayer, “and often bound by the restrictions: you could not do this and you could not do that. Now, having come out into the wide open and into the fresh air, we feel dizzy.”¹²²⁶ That is why Catholic authors of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* point out “that any new forms adopted should in some way

¹²²⁴ Martin Stringer goes even further regarding national customs and traditions in the process of inculturation. He highlights the example of India to prove the point; there the churches “went much further than simply adapting the music and language to local tastes. Attempts were made to incorporate Indian practices and organizations [even from Hinduism] into the church.” (Stringer, *A Sociological History of Christian Worship*, pp. 225-226.) George Guiver mentions “optional readings from Hindu scripture” as “the readings from the daily offices” (Guiver, *Vision upon Vision. Processes of Change and Renewal in Christian Worship*, p. 79). The elements of such approach could be found in Belarus with the Orthodox and Catholic Church. For example, Catholic churches are holding special worship services on November 2, devoted to All Souls' Day. Worship in memory of the dead stirs much interest, and overcrowded churches witness to that, but Baptists are apprehensive about such inculturation of rituals and superstitions.

¹²²⁵ Davis, “Ghetto or Desert,” p. 10.

¹²²⁶ Matviiv, Svyashchenodii pastora, p. 287.

grow organically from forms already existing.”¹²²⁷

If the church is aware of its responsibility before the world, it undergoes a constant process of inculturation. *Ecclesia reformata et semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei*,¹²²⁸ for the boldest steps cannot release tensions between the sacral and secular once and for all. First, this is due to the dual nature of worship itself, which belongs not only to the material world, but also to the spiritual one. Worship invades spiritual realms, and visible forms are used to build a bridge to the invisible world. And the conflict emerging at the intersection of worlds will disappear only in the heavenly liturgy.¹²²⁹

Secondly, a final decision on the translation of the language of the worship service into more contemporary language is not possible due to the relativity of cultural concepts, its fragmentation and the different perception of its elements by people of different ages, different preferences and tastes, different understandings of culture. Continuous changes in culture doom the project, or at least make the adaptation process very complicated, especially considering the technological progress and the limited nature of church resources in comparison to the wider world. The yesterday’s “ultramodern” becomes “modern” today, and “obsolete” tomorrow. Or, according to Hitchcock, “perhaps the greatest irony of the search for relevance is the fact that nothing so quickly becomes irrelevant as that which seemed intensely relevant only a short time before.”¹²³⁰ So, in every worldview context, in each geographical location, at any given moment of time the church decides anew on the use of the language of the local culture and the time of the service for the community, to make it as clear and obvious as possible, so that, as 1 Corinthians 14:8 puts it, the trumpet would sound a clear call.¹²³¹ To describe the existing tensions Davis uses the image of believers “wandering in a desert, without liturgy or public worship, until a return to the promised land becomes possible.”¹²³² Duncan Forrester, Ian McDonald, and Gian Tellini sum up the situation as follows:

But although there are no appropriate forms of liturgy available, the believer cannot live without worship, so privately and in small groups believers will soldier on, sometimes using antiquated or despised forms inherited from the past, sometimes developing a variety of experimental forms of worship for

¹²²⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ch. 1.3.23. It is possible that an example of such organic growth might become taking turns by a presenter and congregation in order to read a new translation of Psalms in the beginning of church service. Such unconventional form for Baptist worship would combine antiquity and novelty, and “a tribute would be rendered” both to the Bible and modern age.

¹²²⁸ Latin for the “Church Reformed and always reforming according to the Word of God.”

¹²²⁹ The notion of liminality, which is characterized by the state of uncertainty, ambivalence, and openness, could support this way of thinking. See Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, pp. 2-4, 65, 68-69. Applying this concept to the forms of worship, we not only see possibilities but we see the need for the development of ideal unchanging forms of worship, and at the same time find room for creativity.

¹²³⁰ Hitchcock, *The Recovery of the Sacred*, p. 29.

¹²³¹ 1 Cor. 14:8.

¹²³² Forrester, McDonald, and Tellini, *Encounter with God*, p. 228.

themselves.¹²³³

This approach may not be perfect but it still seems more preferable than the ghetto or state of permanent confrontation with secular culture.¹²³⁴ In “a reciprocal dialogue between faith and culture”¹²³⁵ worship is born, which transforms both culture and the participants of worship.

Bridging the cultural gap is a labour-intense and challenging task. However, by engaging in inculturation, the church continues to overcome the tension in worship between freedom and form, as well as the personal and social aspects of worship, by keeping in sight the structure and content of worship service and its individual components, involving all the participants in the process. Stopping along the way is similar to death.¹²³⁶ While the church walks in “the wilderness,” the inculturation process will continue, and the congregation will be enriched in life-sustaining tensions between freedom and form, individual and communal aspects of worship, and the sacral and secular dimensions of worship.

¹²³³ Davis, “Ghetto or Desert,” pp. 19-23.

¹²³⁴ Forrester, McDonald, and Tellini, *Encounter with God*, p. 228.

¹²³⁵ Robert Taft, S.J., “The Missionary Efforts of the Eastern Churches as an Example of Inculturation,” in Pecklers, *Worship*, pp. 136-137.

¹²³⁶ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

In this study I have analyzed traditional worship in Baptist churches in Belarus seeking an answer to the following research question: How is the implicit theology, as it is embodied in traditional and present Baptist worship in Belarus, related to understandings of established Baptist worship? This has led me to the research of the historical, political, religious, and theological contexts and their influence on traditional Baptist worship. Following that, I explored the relationship between the implicit theology and present Baptist worship as expressed in structure, content, duration, shape, physical spaces of worship as well the theological emphases of traditional public worship. Bringing all these aspects together I studied their interaction and the inherent tensions that emerge between form and freedom, the communal and personal aspect in worship, and between the traditional form of worship and culture today. Finally, I have considered methods and approaches which might help to resolve the tensions, proposing that rather than seeing these tensions as a limiting factor that need to be fully harmonized, holding a sense of creative tension allows the traditional and distinct forms of Baptist worship to maintain their character whilst making room for a contextually sensitive development of public worship and a broader understanding of worship itself.

I began this project by investigating the importance of worship in the reference system of life and belief of Belarusian Baptists, especially in the days of persecution when worship became a source of spiritual life in difficult times, a key mode for self-actualization, a refuge from the sinful world and a unique place of fellowship and an expression of an alternative lifestyle. Thus, in Part One I made a thorough exploration of the context of the period when traditional worship was shaped. Studies of the origins of evangelical churches in Belarus allowed for a variety of influences and connections to emerge. Evangelical Christianity reached Belarus from different geographical sources: southern and northwestern Ukraine, Siberia, Germany, the United States, the Baltic region, Poland, and some others. As in many cases the awakening was conditioned by relations within a Russian-speaking environment, whereas others were more determined by relations with German and English-speaking believers, the process of adjustment of some western forms to eastern ground resulted in a conflict between local and foreign traditions. Varied perceptions concerning the rigid structure and the preaching schedule within the service is one example of such issues. In other cases, western and eastern traditions merged and gave birth to an Eastern Slavic form of evangelical Christianity. One example is the heritage of hymns used in worship services, and particularly a collection of songs, *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniya*, which contains hymns translated from English and German languages, as well as indigenous hymns. In the conflict of traditions, Baptist identity did not remain fixed but continued to develop during

the Soviet period, and the issue of contextualization became fresh again after the fall of the Iron Curtain, when western forms and practices were reintroduced to Russian-speaking churches.

The study of the theological, religious, and political background drew attention to the theological basis of the movement, the influence of the Orthodox context and persecution in the process of formation. Belarusian Baptists' life and teaching reflect their desire to live and worship according to the Scripture, and to return to the teaching and practice of New Testament church. In regard to worship it expresses itself in the denial of the division of believers into clergy and laity, and rejection of practices seen as 'non-biblical,' such as compulsory confession, making the sign of the cross, special rules for fasting, and infant baptism. The main focus is put on the practices of preaching, teaching, prayer, and singing. However, limited information on early church worship service precludes full engagement with potential biblical models. Even so, practices and models arising out of the reading of Old and New Testaments offer some firmness and stability in the midst of what feels like frightening diversity.

It was noted that the Eastern Orthodox milieu left its mark on the formation of the spirit of public worship, characterized by reverence and awe, as well as on its content and form, including services dedicated to events of the life of Christ, such as Lord's Baptism, The Meeting of the Lord, Annunciation Day, and others. At the same time, a decisive split from Orthodox liturgy was expressed in the rejection of elaborate rites, icons and their use as objects of worship, along with the removal of candles, special garments, a clear-cut division between the priesthood and the laity as expressed in worship, and placing preaching at the center of the worship service. Thereby Baptists in Belarus build their theology on the denial of Orthodox form, but their worship continues to reflect the spirit and character of the Orthodoxy.

Life during long-time persecution, opposition and separation from the world explains motifs of struggle, suffering, and eschatological aspirations together with strong belief in retribution and hope reflected in sermons, songs, and poems. Recent decline in persecution has led to less emphasis on the idea of struggle and decrease in tension of eschatological expectations or motifs of suffering, but still the spirit of the worship service reflects the difficult history of survival of evangelical Christians.

Part Two made detailed analysis of the structure, time, content, and physical space, and the key theological values promoted by traditional Baptist worship, such as centrality of Scripture, the principle of edification, the task of evangelism and simplicity. As this part of the study was based on long-term and immersive participant observation it presented an accurate and wide-ranging picture of the actual practices of most/all/a very wide spread of the traditional-style Baptist churches in Belarus and of the views of pastors and church members as to the meaning, efficacy and impact of that worship as they understood it.

The study of the structure and content of Baptist service in Belarus reflects the fact that it is composed of a combination of preaching, singing and prayer (essential worship components), in different forms, numbers, proportions and orders of following. Preachers as well as other participants usually speak on different topics that are based on “the inspiration of the Spirit.” However, they have common motif: namely, Christ, or Christocentric message. The time factor of the worship is conceptualized in the part of the weekly cycle with its focus on Sunday morning worship service, the monthly circle of services which revolves around the Lord’s Supper, and the yearly circle which embraces all holidays related to the events of Christ’s life and the life of the church. The study has demonstrated that the focus on Christian holidays is weakening (except Christmas and Easter), but they still serve as some kind of a compass in churches’ life and preaching. An examination of the design and the role of the houses of prayer in worship reveals inner contradictions between the practice and declared character of worship, which can be seen in the ambiguous status of the houses of prayer: house of prayer as “a building” and as “a temple.” Worship hall decorated with biblical texts is a reminder of the conflict with the Orthodoxy, reflected in this case in replacing icons with “talking” pictures. The changes also touched the structure of the sanctuary. For example, there has been an observed a shift from the pulpit to the stage; the barrier between the hall and the stage is diminishing, and the space of worship acquires and increasingly non-hierarchical arrangement.

Part Two also offers a more detailed and specific examination of the theological emphases of traditional worship services. Their review again turns the attention to the decisive role of the context, both theological, religious and political, in the formation of these values, and also points to an inner conflict within a local worship service in terms of its practical realization, such as the shift from the Bible to the sermon, the imbalance of worship in favor of (poor) edification or evangelism, or simplification that comes in place of simplicity.

Part Three evaluates these findings, analyzing the nature of the internal conflicts between freedom and forms in worship, the individual and corporate aspects of the service, and the sacral and secular character of worship. Such kind of analysis seeks ways of developing a dynamic theology of worship under the changing context. At the same time it keeps its own theological emphases and its Baptist identity.

Examination of the structure and the individual worship components reveal that the pursuit of freedom and spontaneity is expressed in flexibility, encouragement, greater involvement of the congregation, and in openness to the Holy Spirit manifesting Himself through believers for the benefit of members. A rigid attitude toward forms can limit the freedom in Christ and quench both the Spirit and the expression of gifts. At the same time this approach tends to lead to unsystematic teaching, low quality or even disorder.

In worship practice the “priesthood of all believers” is manifested in a variety of participants within the service, and allowing individuals to express feelings and desires. It also brings dynamism and adds some color to it. But an exaggerated attention to individual participants can underestimate the significance of a church as a body of believers. The edifying element suffers from an individual and subjective dimension.

Traditional worship that has naturally preferred the model of “Christ against culture,” traditional style and topics, and marked by a special worldview, is sometimes difficult to reconcile with the needs and understanding of outsiders and young believers. The language of worship, which is based on Synodal translation, as well as music styles or dress style are part of the cultural gap between church and the “sinful world.” Due to earlier hostility and persecution by the state and society, this separation leads to a creation of a subculture and understanding of worship service as a shelter or refuge. So some theological and practical steps are needed to address the tension between freedom and forms in worship, the individual and corporate aspects of the service, and the sacral and secular character of worship.

Thus, the final chapter proposed some theological grounds and practical ways of reducing the tensions, of enriching the worship service, and using all the potential of worship. These include a proper understanding of the opposites, such as structure and freedom, and their reciprocal concessions to each other, a clarification of the nature of the church, of the concept of priesthood, and of the essence of corporate worship, which leads to disciplined participation, and an inculturation that begins with the foundation of worship, the Bible, and continues with sermons and music.

Summarizing the tension between freedom and form, it is important to note that it cannot be considered in isolation from the heritage formed by historical and interethnic relationships, and the context determined by the religious and political environment, first of all by persecution and limited opportunities in the Soviet period. Understanding these factors and their expression in the practice of worship makes it possible to accept the relativity of forms, and focus on the purpose of gatherings, subordinating to it both the inspiration of the Spirit and forms in worship. Thus balance between freedom and form can be achieved, and benefits drawn from their invisible rivalry.

In the churches of Belarus, it is necessary to clarify the nature of the church as a Body of Christ at the theological level, and to differentiate between public and private worship. The definition of the very concept of “participation in a worship service” must be clarified; the same can be said of the understanding of the priesthood of all believers in terms of worship. In practical terms, this requires careful planning and preparation for worship, as well as a more serious approach to corporate aspects of worship, including the selection of active participants of

worship service, and limiting the participation of some while encouraging the participation of others.

While critically approaching the local expression of secular culture, the church must also look for traces of God's providence in the history of Belarus and the work of non-believing contemporaries in order to find a place for them in worship. Worship leaders should avoid both complete identification with and radical rejection of the customs, habits, and values of Belarusians. An awareness of the country's history and other Christian traditions allows maintaining the key elements of worship in balance and expressing them in a way that bears in mind the specific context of the country, region or even a particular church. However, in this work I stress that the tensions cannot be solved once and for all as to some extent, they are an integral part of worship and arise from the nature of worship and the church itself. Moreover, they are important for viability, vitality, openness, and durability, so that inculturation becomes an ongoing process.

The completed analysis of traditional public worship suggests some areas for future work. First of all, there is a need for wider historical research. There are a lot of documents of the Council for Religious Affairs in the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus. Many of them have not been studied in detail. Primarily they are of interest in relation to state and church relationships but at the same time, they contain much information on worship. Visiting regional archives in Mogilev, Brest, and Grodno, as well as archives in Belostok and Warsaw (Poland), which I was not able to do due to constraints of the present project, would be a fruitful and rewarding task in terms of more deeply understanding the significant factors that influenced the shape and nature of Baptist church life and worship in Belarus. Also, more magazines published by evangelicals in the first third of the twentieth century are now available to view and they could clarify some questions concerning the formation of the traditional patterns of worship.

Secondly, it would be beneficial to give attention to a closer study and analysis of cultural context and public worship which would cover more churches geographically (specially the northern and eastern part of Belarus) and obtain more extensive feedback from worship participants, primarily regular congregation members. Data from a study like this could help in measuring the effectiveness and relevance of worship in a given context at a given time. As I have analysed the worship service as a whole, there is value in more research going deeper into particular components of worship, or into the content of sermons and songs. Thirdly, one could continue working on a theology of worship in a Russian-speaking context. The work of theologians representing other traditions and Baptists scholars from other countries, not just in the West, as well as research from the perspective of cultural studies, and possibly anthropology

and psychology,¹²³⁷ could be helpful in developing the theological tradition and understanding of the culture of worship in Belarus and other Russian-speaking countries. From a practical point of view such studies could be a good basis for building a culture of worship, developing resources to assist pastors and those who lead worship and music ministry with the goal of realizing the potential of gathering and the execution of the commands of Christ to worship “in spirit and truth.”¹²³⁸

To come to the last words about the future of traditional worship. In its present state the structure and content of traditional worship satisfies many believers. This is confirmed by the viability of the practice of such worship not just in small towns and villages with only one church and no alternative, but also in regional centers and in the capital, where Christians have a choice of various forms, including contemporary worship. As Cherenkov states, “Evangelical churches have not yet resolved to make a risky step into the future, so the traditional evangelical Christianity is currently the dominant type.”¹²³⁹ The dynamics of change in Baptist Union churches in Belarus suggests that the traditional form will retain its position in the foreseeable future. However, it will no longer be seen as undisputed and the only acceptable form, and the understanding of traditional worship as such is gradually going to change along with the changing context, as a result of engagement with other traditions, the arrival of new people in church, and development of theological education (the observed decrease in the number of sermons during last decades is a part of this process). The question is whether the churches are ready to manage the change, or the rapidly changing context will make its changes, regardless of their desires and strategies. In any case, the study of the history and the context of Baptist formation in Belarus, the analysis of the present situation within traditional style churches, and a better understanding of a theology of worship and other traditions of worship require a revision of the tradition,¹²⁴⁰ and this research sets a context in which the necessity of revision of the tradition can be more clearly seen but in a way that seeks to honour the history of its formation and give a more theologically grounded voice to those aspects of the tradition that can enrich worship in the future.

¹²³⁷ People may be either extroverts or introverts, depending on the direction of their activity; thinking, feeling, sensing, intuitive, according to their own information pathways; judging or perceiving, depending on the method in which they process received information. C.G. Jung, *Psychological Types* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 330-407. Different people prefer different types of worship. Some prefer order and organization, others like spontaneity and freedom.

¹²³⁸ John 4:24.

¹²³⁹ Cherenkov, *Litsom k litsu. Evangel'skaya vera v sovremennoi kul'ture*, p. 54.

¹²⁴⁰ Christopher Ellis thinks “it likely that amongst those local churches which continue to decline there will be a preponderance of traditional worship styles, namely the 'hymn sandwich' more properly called 'interspersed singing'.” (“Understanding Worship: Trends and Criteria,” p. 33.) It would take additional study to apply this conclusion to the Belarusian situation.

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